

## Bishop Hicks' Column

September 2024

*God Blessed the Seventh Day  
and Made it Holy*



"I don't have time for this!" These were the words that were on replay in my head as I drove from Joliet to Mundelein Seminary a few weeks ago. I was headed to a 3-1/2 day regional retreat for all the bishops from Illinois, Indiana and Wisconsin. In my justified view, my saturated work schedule simply did not leave any room for this spiritual "indulgence." Yet, motivated mostly by duty, I checked into my room and asked the Lord to help me check my bad attitude at the door.

As God would have it, my prayer was immediately answered. We were introduced to our retreat director, Reverend Ron Rolheiser, OMI. You may know of him. He is a Catholic priest, theology professor and prolific author. You might be familiar with a number of his books on spirituality, the most popular entitled "The Holy Longing."

One of his thought-provoking talks was about the Sabbath. He reminded us that the Sabbath is a day of rest and religious observance that is rooted in the biblical creation narrative, where God rested on the seventh day after creating the world. Henceforth, by God resting on the seventh day, this day of rest was declared and ordained for everyone, forever.

Practically, in Judaism, the Sabbath begins at sunset on Friday and ends at nightfall on Saturday, during which work is prohibited. The Sabbath is devoted to rest, prayer, and family. For Catholics, we honor the seventh day on Sunday, commemorating the resurrection of Jesus, with a focus on worship and rest. Even the word "Sabbatical" comes from the word "Sabbath."

Father Rolheiser tested us: "How many of your flock truly take Sundays as a day of worship and rest?" "How many of them have replaced worship and rest with work, shopping, sports, entertainment or traveling?" Then he questioned, "Bishops, how many of *your* Sundays include not only worship, but also some rest? Hmm?"

Father provided us with some simple and clear guidance of what sabbath time should look like in Catholic life and culture. I found it enlightening, and so I'll share:

1. Rest: We live in a 24/7 culture. We are busy all the time. If God rested on the seventh day, then so too shall we who are made in His image and likeness. We each need to take a day to rest and recharge our batteries.

2. Change it up: Sunday is a special day to stop all the ordinary things in our lives and do something unordinary. The Sabbath is an invitation to do something that you do not do during the week. And what we do or don't do will be different for each of us depending on our different lives and circumstances. For example, if you work in an office all week, it might be good on Sunday to go outside, cut the grass and work in your garden. Whereas if you are a farmer, you might prefer one day away from your fields, lawn, and garden to instead sit inside and read a book. The point is to stop what we typically do throughout the week and take one day to do something unordinary, or even extraordinary.
3. Celebrate: Sabbath is a time for special celebrations. Years ago, the Sabbath was the day to stop normal work, take a bath, put on your best clothes, go to mass, come home, and eat a big dinner at the dining room table with family and friends. These days, we may not dress up in fancy clothes and our meals might be simpler or taken at a restaurant, yet we can all make sure that attending Sunday mass is always part of our Sunday celebrations.

Do you ever echo my words, "I have no time for this!" It is all too easy to use that excuse in the busyness of our weeks. But then we risk becoming workaholic, burned out machines who have no "off-switch" or downtime. At the end of my 3-1/2 days of sabbath time at the bishops' retreat, I thanked God for leading me to the precious time to pray, reflect, sleep, read, learn, walk around the grounds, and socialize.

We all need – in fact, instinctively crave- sabbath time! So please join me by reflecting on your own life and asking yourself, "How do I honor the Sabbath?" You may realize your Sundays still need to include some work, shopping, sports, entertainment or traveling. But please don't let those activities replace participating in Sunday Mass. Treat yourself, every Sunday, to the greatest gift Jesus gave us: the Eucharist. Nourished and refreshed by the Eucharist and celebrating our faith as a community, we can be energized to go out living our faith in the world on the road to salvation.