

## Homily - 25<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time, Cycle C - R.V.Gartland

Our first reading today is from the prophet Amos. Amos is one of the social justice prophets. This theme of denouncing the rich for their abuse of the poor and the needy is a recurring theme with the prophets Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Micah; but in Amos, we have it in its most concentrated form. Amos just never lets up. Dr. Martin Luther King sites Amos often in his social justice speeches.

In today's reading from Amos, we see the intersection of contempt for religious observance with exploitation of the poor. The wealthy squirm with impatience as they wait for the festival of the moon to end and the Sabbath to be over, so they can return to their business. And shamelessly, they admit that their business is exploiting the poor. Diminishing the Ephod (not giving people a full bushel), adding to the shekel (adding inferior quality ore to the coin so it has the correct weight, but not the correct value), fixing the scale – cheating in the weighing.

One of the saddest things in our time, I believe, is the disregard of the Sabbath. We've lost our Sabbath consciousness. We are no longer waiting for the Sabbath to be over to get back to work, we work right through the Sabbath. Often, it is difficult to distinguish Sunday from every other day.

As a kid growing up in Camden, I knew it was Sunday. The day was different. Of course we went to church, but even in the secular world Sunday was different. Stores were closed – now the bakery was open till after the last Mass, but the A and P and Mrs. Madison's Corner Store were closed. Even the gas stations were closed. Sunday ride meant filling up on Saturday. Sunday dinner meant buying all you needed by Saturday afternoon. Now the movies and bars were open, but the bars could sell packaged goods. I remember a number of times, as a kid of 11 or 12, being sent to the local bar with two pitchers, for beer when guests arrived. I clearly remember walking down Haddon Avenue with two full pitchers of beer – I'm not sure what the ABC or Dyfs would say about this today.

Everyone knew that Sunday was different than every other day. Today, everything is open. Business goes on as usual. There are fewer people in Church. In 1960, 75-80% of Catholics were at Mass every Sunday. Today, it is more like 25-30%

From a biblical perspective this loss of the sense of the Sabbath is nothing short of disastrous. The Ten Commandments are still in effect, and one of them is "Remember to keep holy the Lord's Day."

The importance of Sabbath observance runs through the entire Bible. Obviously it is very important.

Rabbi Abram Heshel gives a few good reasons for the importance of the Sabbath:

1. Sabbath observance, he says, is one of the ideas that is most characteristic of Judaism. The early Christians were good Jews. They kept the Sabbath concept as basic to this new way of Jesus, and changed the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday, the Day of the Lord, and the Day of the Resurrection. Sunday became the day to make holy.

**2. The Sabbath is a day of equality. Whether you are rich or poor, slave or free, worker or manager, success or failure, in-group or out-group, it doesn't really matter too much on the Sabbath. On the Sabbath, every person is equal as a son or daughter of God.**

**3. It is a day when all distinctions fade. A day we all pause and realize our equity, as children of God - how much we are all like one another. What a different world we would have if we could get this concept right.**

**4. The Sabbath is a day to stop our work, and remember how dependant we all are on the goodness of God. All we have is gift. What a tragedy when we forget these facts.**

**5. The Sabbath is the presence of eternity in time. The Lord rests, and we are invited to rest with the Lord. To stop, pause, and play in the transcendent dimension of our life. To touch the transcendent, so we never forget it in the busy or the humdrum or the survival mode that often characterizes our week.**

**Today, more than ever, we need this healthy pause. Today, more than ever, we need the Sabbath. And it no longer comes automatically. Today, we need to work to make a conscious effort to observe the Sabbath.**

**The days of the week ahead are conditioned by what we do on Sunday. I promise you that if you make a concentrated effort to make Sunday different, to make time for God, then the week ahead will be different. Your life will change—for the better.**

**The Fathers of Vatican Council II wanted to intensify our experience of Sunday Mass, so with great effort, they set about renewing our liturgy and calling for a greater participation of all in the Sunday Eucharist. They gave us the Liturgy we celebrate today, a liturgy that pulls us in and helps us to focus on community. This is a great gift to the Church.**

**Do you want to improve your life? Then go to Mass on Sunday and encourage your kids with all the persuasion you can muster; encourage your relatives and friends. Don't let them off the hook too easily. It is important; it can change your life and theirs.**

**Sunday Mass for us Catholic Christians is not an option. It is an obligation, a responsibility of our baptism. It is an obligation not because God needs it, but because we need it. We need to come together, - we need to gather with others, - to listen to God's word, to be strengthened by the Eucharist, and then to go into the week ahead refreshed, renewed, and recommitted to building the kingdom of God in our time, with what we have. Do what you can to invite others to Mass and you will be contributing to a better world.**

**Sabbath is not just Mass, as important as that might be. It is a whole day that we should make special. Read a good book, take a walk in the park or around the neighborhood, have a special meal with tablecloths and candles, visit family, contact friends, examine your conscience, read your bible, plan the week ahead. Make Sunday different. Reclaim the Sabbath.**

**Don't be like the folks of Amos' time - anxious to get it over so they could get back to work. Keep Holy the Sabbath, and in some sure way, the Sabbath will keep you holy, too.**