

It's the season for recreation, travel, and the cottage. Church and God may be far from your thoughts. But because God created summer, your vacation destination, and even you, maybe you should give Him more attention.

If you are a Catholic, you know the expression "Sunday obligation." It may be associated with negative childhood memories. Mom woke you up when you would rather sleep in. Dad corralled you and your siblings into the car. You fidgeted because you couldn't see anything from the back pew. Mom hushed you. Mass was just something you had to do.

Isn't the "Sunday obligation" a thing of the past? Isn't there a summer exemption now?

In an era when society questions—even despises—rules, the Sunday obligation seems archaic. However, it comes with good intentions. It was to help people from straying too far from God. Although "absence makes the heart grow fonder," prolonged absence makes the heart grow cold. Love can be forgotten and betrayed.

In a loving relationship, such as in an engaged couple, the two want to spend time together. They send love notes. They re-read the notes with joy. They share meals together. The bride admires her engagement ring and thinks longingly about her future husband.

This is how the Lord's Day should be. The Sunday obligation is not like handcuffs, but like an engagement ring, a sign of love and fidelity. We are so in love with Jesus that we want to spend time with Him. We want to hear His love notes to us in the Bible readings. We hunger for that special meal with Him, the Lord's Supper, where He Himself nourishes us.

Like the engaged couple discovers at their wedding celebration, we are not alone in our faith journey. We encourage others by our presence and they encourage us by theirs. We are part of something far bigger than ourselves. At church, we ask for forgiveness, we forgive others, we love them, we pray for them, and sometimes, we help them.

If you feel you do not love Jesus enough, pray for that gift. Is Father's homily boring? Pray for him!

Sure, we can find God in nature. But at Mass, we receive the Body and Blood, the Soul and Divinity of Christ in the Eucharist. We receive unity with God. As the Gospel of John says, "those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them."

The Sunday obligation is more than just attending Mass. It is respecting the Sabbath, which has its links to the Old Testament, the Ten Commandments, and to the day of rest that God took after creating the world. The Catechism states, "the faithful are to refrain from engaging in work or activities that hinder the worship owed to God, the joy proper to the Lord's Day, the performance of the works of mercy, and the appropriate relaxation of mind and body."

The Church's requirement to respect the Sabbath is counter-cultural. In a world plagued with burnout, it is a prophetic voice to slow us down. It puts the proper focus upon God. Receiving Christ in the Eucharist is the deepest kind of renewal—more refreshing than curling up with a good book. It is more life-giving than a day at the beach.

On holidays, we want to "really live." We guard every precious minute of that hard-earned time off. Going to Church, attending Mass isn't wasting that time. It's using it in the best possible way.

When making plans for holidays, I encourage you to schedule time for your family to joyfully worship God.

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