

St. Luke in the Acts says that the assembly at which Paul celebrated the Lord's Supper, gathered on the first day of the week? St. Luke was not interested in the day of the week for its own sake, nor was he concerned with merely giving a calendar date. He frequently mentions that Paul and the other missionaries went to the synagogue on the Sabbath, because this was a certain way of securing a good-sized audience to listen to their message.

The Evangelists also note not once but several times that our Lord rose from the dead on the first day of the week (Sunday). The reason for this was to show that He kept His promise to rise on the third day. But, there was another reason. It was to mark the first day of the week as especially sacred. It was the day of the Lord's greatest triumph, His resurrection.

There is still another reason why the first day of the week was chosen as the Christians' distinctive holy day. The first day, or Sunday, was the day on which the Christian Church was officially inaugurated by the coming of the Holy Spirit and the abundant outpouring of His graces and fruits on the Apostles. So great were the results of this outpouring that the Apostles were instantly transformed into giants of courage. The day, Pentecost, is often referred to as the birthday of the Church. It was a Sunday.

One last reason for selecting the first day of the week, Sunday, instead of the last day, the Sabbath or Saturday, was to distinguish the Christians from the Jews, and

Christianity from the religion of Moses. The Jewish holy day was the Sabbath or Saturday. The Christians chose Sunday under the leadership of our Lord's official spokesmen, the Apostles, as their weekly day of prayer and worship.

The conclusion is fully justified, therefore, in view of the indications already given that the first day of the week or Sunday has already become the holy day of the Christians, that the Apostles had already sanctioned the practice of keeping the first day of the week as the Lord's day or the holy day.

But little by little, under the guidance of the Apostles and the Holy Spirit, the Christians came to realize that the new practices and the new observances contained and improved on all that was good in the old religion. Thus the new rite of Baptism succeeded circumcision. To the bloody sacrifices of the old law succeeded the sacrifice of Calvary, to be memorialized and re-presented in the rite of the Lord's Supper. And so, little by little, the first day of the week, Sunday, was substituted for the Sabbath as the day for general worship and rest.

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Did Jesus Observe The Sabbath?

St. Paul tells us God "sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law" (Gal. 4:4). This means that Jesus chose to make Himself subject to the law of Moses, although He was and remains forever superior to all law.

The Old Testament contained prophecy, a moral and a ceremonial or ritual code. Christ realized the prophetic part of the Old Testament. The moral code was imperfect; Christ brought it to perfection. The ceremonial part of the law, which prescribed circumcision, ablutions, and so forth, and forbade certain foods as unclean or defiling, was a foreshadowing of more perfect things to come.

The law of Moses remains in the Christian law. But in another sense the Old Law ceases to be. This is the teaching of St. Paul. He unmistakably expresses it in the following words: "But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a custodian (The Law)" (Gal. 3:22-25). When the law had accomplished that duty, it ceased to be; its work was done, its usefulness ended. In other words, the law of Moses gives place to the law of Christ. This repeal of the law of Moses included the Sabbath. "Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a sabbath. These are only a shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ" (Col. 2:16-17).

Clearly then the law of Moses as such has been abrogated by Christ according to the teaching of the Apostle Paul. With this teaching the rest of the Apostles agreed. Peter had been granted a special vision in which it was made known to him that the law of Moses no longer was binding, and this view was solemnly ratified by all the Apostles at the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:10).

It should not be thought, however, that the moral law, contained in the law of Moses, has lost its binding force. The moral element of the law is definitely sanctified by Christ; but it is no longer the law of Moses; it is the law of Christ, and from Him has its obliging force. The part of the Sabbath law which binds us to acknowledge God, and set aside some time for His worship is part of the moral law, but that part which specifies the Sabbath as the Lord's day, is part of the ceremonial law, which no longer binds. The duty of acknowledging the Creator by appropriate acts of worship is unalterable.

Circumcision and all such ritual observances, including the observance of the Sabbath as the day to be held especially "holy to the Lord," are things of the past. To insist on returning to the Sabbath of the Old Testament and make it binding on Christians would be to expose oneself to the embarrassing question of St. Paul: "But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and beggarly elemental

spirits, whose slaves you want to be once more?" (Gal. 4:9).

Our Lord's actions indicate what He meant when He said that He had come to fulfill the law of Moses. He frequently came into conflict with the Jewish doctors of the law in regard to the Sabbath. He would have no part of the narrow, rigorist interpretation of the Sabbath rest. The Master stated the principle that "the sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath." This means that the Sabbath is not an end in itself, but a means to an end. Jesus made the most significant statement: "The Son of Man is Lord even of the sabbath" (Mark 2:28). This implies much more than appears on the surface. The Sabbath law was given by God through Moses. When the Lord says that He is the Master of the Sabbath, He means that He is superior to the law. He can be superior to the law, which God Himself has promulgated, only if He is the equal of God. Jesus claimed to be just that. Accordingly He has full authority to interpret His own law, to modify it, to apply it or to suspend and abrogate it, should He choose to do so.

There are several accounts of cures effected by Jesus on the Sabbath. In each case the Pharisees took exception to His actions, because they were performed on the Sabbath. From these examples, it can be seen how Jesus began to transform and change the Sabbath law.

The Epistle to the Hebrews says of the Old Covenant: "In speaking of a new covenant he treats the first as obsolete. And what is

becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away" (Heb. 8:13). (See also related passages: Heb. 7:18, 8:6-7, 10:11)

It was because of the imperfection of the Old Covenant, and its inability to take away sin or bring anything to perfection, that Jesus came to establish the New Covenant. "Therefore he (Christ) is the mediator of the new covenant" (Heb. 9:15).

St. Paul wrote to the Colossians: "Let no one pass judgment on you . . . with regard to . . . a sabbath" (Col. 2:16). Christ inaugurated a new holy day, or Lord's Day. There are evidences in the New Testament of the beginning of the substitution of the first day of the week (Sunday) for the Sabbath (Saturday) as the day especially to be consecrated to God by prayer and worship. The initial indication that the first day was observed and made holy in a special way is found in Acts 20:7. "On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them." Here we note the elements of Sunday worship as it is followed in the Church to this day: 1) the breaking of bread, which designates the celebration of the Lord's Supper (Catholics call it the Mass); 2) the sermon.

The second indication is found in 1 Corinthians 16:2. St. Paul here refers to the collection for the poor Christians of Palestine. It is that on this day each week the faithful gathered for their religious unions and the celebration of the Lord's Supper.