

# Souls at Rest: An Exploration of the Idea of Sabbath

By Charlotte Ostermann

## Foreword

by Marty Barrack, Author of *Second Exodus*

“And on the seventh day God finished his work which he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all his work which he had done in creation.” The Hebrew word *shabat*, often translated rest, in fact means “cease.” When God finished that work He ceased doing it. He did not tell Adam and Eve to rest; they did no work in Eden. God had blessed the seventh day, making it the Lord’s Day.

God’s first word to man about rest came with the manna. On the sixth day the people Israel gathered twice as much manna as usual. Moses told them why. “Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy sabbath to the Lord.” This prepared the people Israel for God’s third Sinai commandment, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.” The *mitzvot* of times and seasons include, “Do not travel on the Sabbath outside one’s place of residence.” “Sanctify the Sabbath.” “Do no work on the Sabbath.” “Rest on the Sabbath.”

The Son of God during his mortal life lived as a devout Jew, observing the Sabbath laws. But St. Paul, also a devout Jew, wrote to the city-church in Rome, “Do you not know, brethren – for I am speaking to those who know the law – that the law is binding on a person only during his life.” Death ends a Jew’s obligations under the Torah. When Jesus rose from the dead, He began celebrating the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass instead, as He had in the Upper Room. But the Church Fathers tell us that He now celebrated it on the “eighth day” of the week, what we now call Sunday, the day He rose from death.

The eighth day! In ancient Hebrew gematria seven represented God’s completion of His natural creation. And so Jewish apocalyptic writings describe the eighth day as a new day, a day outside creation, a supernatural day, the day of the Messiah. When the Tabernacle was complete God commanded Moses to count seven days of preparation. During those seven days Moses put up the Tabernacle each morning and took it apart

each evening. On the eighth day he put it up and left it standing, and on that day the Tabernacle services began. The eighth day is also the day of the *brit milah*, circumcision, the sign of a man's entry into the Mosaic covenant.

The early Jewish Christians seeing themselves as Jews, continued with Sabbath worship in the Temple and breaking bread in their homes. But by 60 AD they had become visibly different. Following Jesus' example, they began to celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass on the eighth day, Sunday. And in 70 AD God allowed the Temple to be destroyed.

This background illuminates for us that the Lord's Day is extraordinary, a day on which Michelangelo's great image at the center of the Sistine Chapel ceiling, in which God and man reach out to touch one another, becomes absolutely real. Each Sunday Christ gives Himself to us, whole and entire, His Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity. But the sacramental covenant of the Holy Eucharist is, as in the Sacrament of Matrimony, an exchange of persons. Christ gives Himself to us, but we also give ourselves to Him, whole and entire, our body, blood, soul and humanity. In this way we prepare for heaven, by making ourselves as much His image and likeness as we can.

Pope John Paul II, observing the worldwide sudden disappearance of Christianity from public life and the worldwide sudden appearance of so many hate-filled men driven to kill innocent women and children, believed that we are living today in the final confrontation between good and evil. Father John A. Hardon, SJ, his close friend and my mentor in the Faith, constantly repeated in the voice of an Old Testament prophet, "Ordinary Catholics will not survive. Only heroic Catholics will survive." Ordinary Catholics, after Sunday Mass, might perhaps watch a football game on television to relax and then go out to a restaurant for a family dinner. In the 1950s that may have been enough, but in this dark age when the demonic is all around us, we need to put on the whole armor of God at least on the Lord's Day.

The archangel Gabriel told the Blessed Virgin, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you ..." (Luke 1:35). Devout Jews wear a prayer shawl with fringes called a *tallit* to enter into an intimate relationship with God. In Jewish tradition, to spread one's *tallit* over a woman is to overshadow her, to have relations with her, to become "one flesh." The Holy Spirit overshadowed the Blessed Virgin, spread His *tallit* over her, entering into an intimate marital relationship with her. Catholics have ever since called her the spouse of the Holy Spirit.

God has given us the Lord's Day as a supernatural day in which we can wrap ourselves in the Holy Spirit's *tallit* and truly give ourselves to Him as a bride gives herself to her husband, inviting His indwelling presence to enter more deeply into us. He has now sent Mrs. Charlotte Ostermann to teach us how. She calls the Lord's Day the Christian Sabbath. Strictly speaking, Sunday worship is not the Sabbath, which is the seventh day. The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass on the eighth day *fulfills* the Sabbath. But she does this to remind us that the Sabbath's ancient origins and transcendent intimacy with God remain in the Lord's Day. Jesus told us, "The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath."

Catholic spiritual writers have always recognized the difference between *doing* and *being*. Holy Mother Church leads us to *be* holy. As an expression of our being holy we *do* holy things, but *being* holy is the state by which we hope to reach heaven for all eternity. Charlotte shows us that by trusting Jesus we really can wrap ourselves in the Holy Spirit's *tallit*, bringing His indwelling presence more deeply into ourselves, *becoming* tranquil in His presence. Charlotte tells us that, in the end, the Sabbath is God's poem of eternity. Come, join me on the journey to enter it.