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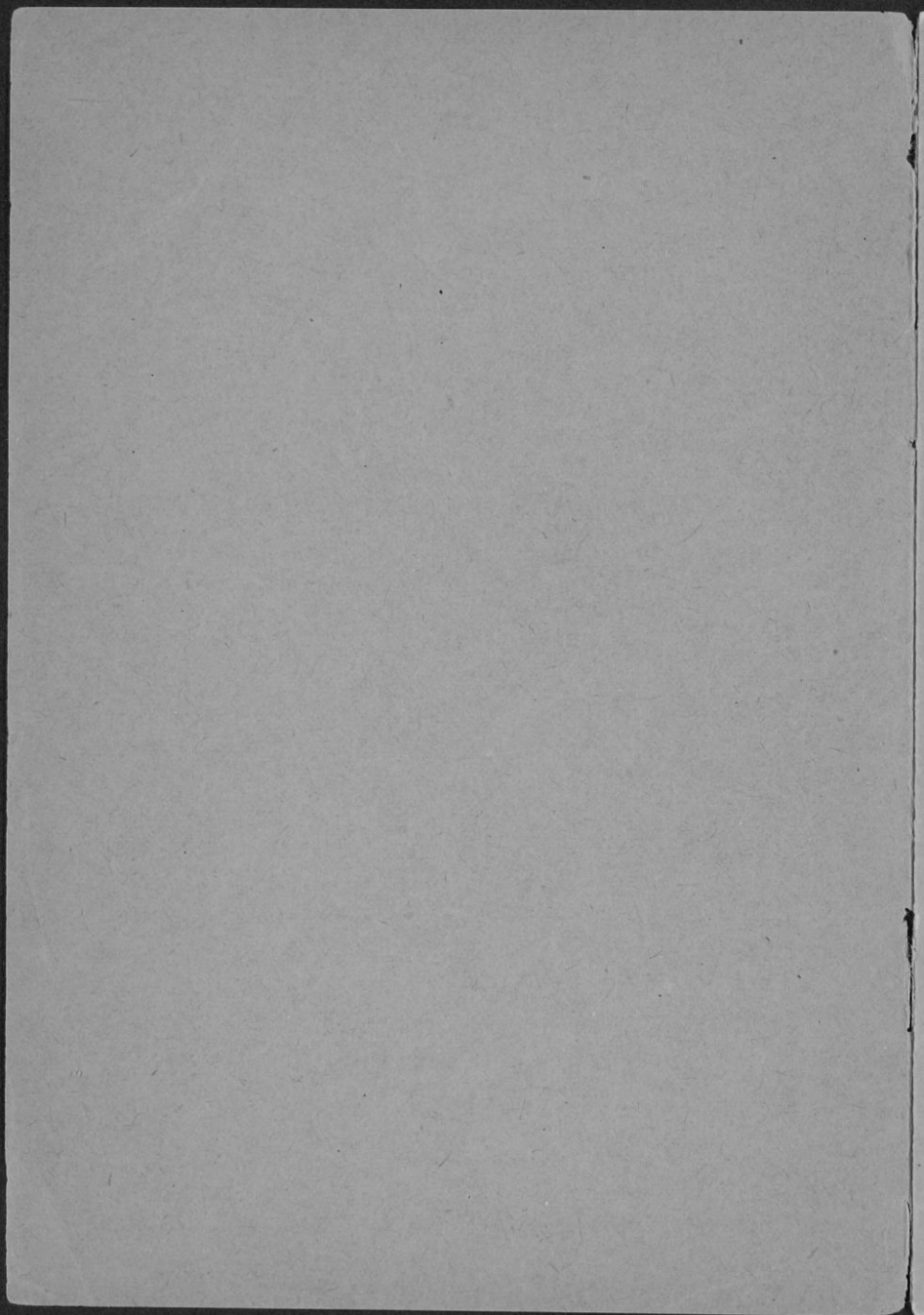
# Keeping Sunday Holy

BY

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New York  
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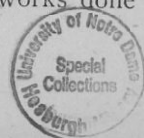
# Keeping Sunday Holy.

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“And Jesus said to them: Come apart into a desert place, and rest awhile” (Mark vi. 31).

**M**EN are bound, by the natural and divine law, to consecrate some part of their time to the service of God. All our lives, indeed, are given us that we may serve God, and, by doing so, obtain eternal happiness; and, in one sense, we are bound to give all our time to Him. This is the lesson Our Lord teaches us in His first recorded words: “Did you not know that I must be about my Father’s business?”

These words convey to us that everything we do should make a part of the service which we owe to our Creator. Great things and small; our work, our rest, and our recreation should all be consecrated to God, so as to be “our Father’s business.” “All whatsoever you do, in word or work, all things do ye in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God, and the Father by Him” (Colos. iii. 17). The commonest actions of life, the daily duties you have to do in your families, the routine of your business, the amusements by which life’s toil is lightened, are all so many works done for God’s



service, if only they are consecrated to Him by a good intention.

Men cannot, however, persevere in this kind of service unless they also set apart a sufficient proportion of their time for direct communication with Him. They owe Him a debt of worship and praise, and, at the same time, are in constant need of graces, which can only be obtained by prayer. "Come ye to Him, and be enlightened, and your faces shall not be confounded" (Ps. xxxiii. 6). If we do not come into the presence of God as we ought to do, the world soon becomes very dark to us, and the store of good will and intention soon becomes exhausted, and the daily works of life soon cease to be in any sense the service of God.

The time which we consecrate directly to God is the salt with which all our lives are seasoned; but "if the salt lose its savor, wherewith shall it be salted?" (Matt. v. 13.) Those, therefore, who are remiss in prayer, and neglect to give a fair share of their time to God's service, soon lose the savor of goodness, which ought to make even their most trifling actions acceptable to God.

It is, then, the law of God, and the law of our nature, that we should consecrate a portion of our time to Him, and this is laid down to us in the Third Commandment, which says: "Remember thou keep holy the Sabbath Day." In the New Law, however, the times and seasons which we are to dedicate to Him have been left to the ordering of His Church. This is clear, as I before showed, from the fact that all the days which God commanded the Jews to keep holy have been abrogated in the Christian Church, and new days have been substituted in their place. Not only have the festivals which belonged in a particular manner to the Jewish dispensation been

changed, but even the ancient Sabbath Day, which was from the beginning, has been put aside. The Church in apostolic times appointed a new day, and allowed the Sabbath Day, by degrees, to fall into disuse; so that the Lord's Day, the Christian Sunday, is in no sense the same festival which the Jews observed. It is appointed, indeed, with the same general object—that is, to give to God's service a proper proportion of our time; but the memories, the spirit, and the rules of its observance are essentially different.

As the Church appoints the days we are to offer to God, so it tells us how we are to consecrate them to Him; and, to observe them properly, we must attend to the laws and to the spirit of the Catholic Church. There is scarcely any duty of a Christian life which is of greater importance than the due observance of Sunday. Those who are engaged in the ordinary pursuits of men cannot generally give much of their time to prayer during the week, and, therefore, if they do not sanctify Sunday, they very soon fall away. The spirit of prayer is dried up within them, and they become cold and indifferent in the service of God. Those, on the other hand, who are devout in the observance of Sunday, are perpetually renewing their fervor.

“Be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man, who, according to God, is created in justice and holiness of truth” (Eph. iv. 23). How can we be “renewed in the spirit of our minds” if we do not frequently come near to Our Lord, by giving a reasonable time to His service? A household, then, in which the Sunday is well observed, where the parents take pains to teach their children, by word and example, to keep Sunday holy, and make it a day of piety and devotion, is sure



to have the blessing of God; the parents have, at any rate, given to their children, for their after life, a most efficacious remedy against the dangers and temptations of the world. On the other hand, when fathers and mothers neglect to instill into their children's minds this reverence and devotion for the Lord's Day, the time of temptation comes, and the children are deprived of the arms with which to fight against it.

With regard to the observance of Sunday, Catholics in this country are placed in a difficult position. We are surrounded by good and well-meaning people, who would turn the Christian Sunday into a Jewish Sabbath. Such people would keep Sunday with an austerity which resembles that of the Pharisees; they would forbid any kind of recreation and enjoyment, so as to make it a day of gloom and restraint, instead of a refreshment to soul and body.

Our Lord tells us that "the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath;" and any degree of severity which prevents the Sunday from being a day of real rest is inconsistent with the object for which it was instituted, and, moreover, gives rise to a very dangerous reaction.

It is impossible, however, not to have some sympathy with those whose mistake consists in wanting to give a great deal to the service of God, and who are very self-denying and consistent in carrying out what appears to them to be His Law.

On the other hand, there is around us a great deal of laxity in the observance of Sunday, and this is a much more dangerous error. Great numbers of people are to be found who look on the Sunday simply as a day of amusement and idleness, and would give little or nothing



to Almighty God. This is very dangerous, because our own natural inclinations dispose us to fall in very easily with such a view of our duties.

Between these opposite errors Catholics have to guide their course, and they can only do so by attending to the commands and to the Spirit of the Church. We must endeavor, in the first place, not to give scandal. It is well, as far as possible, to avoid anything which may unnecessarily shock religious people, and make them fancy that we are careless in observing Sunday. Their prejudices sometimes seem to us unfounded and unreasonable, but still charity suggests that we should rather deny ourselves than do anything to alienate them from the Church. St. Paul says: "Take heed, lest, perhaps, this your liberty become a stumbling-block to the weak . . . through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish for whom Christ died?" (1 Cor. viii. 9.) Catholics sometimes forget this principle of charity, and think it a fine thing to give this kind of scandal—and particularly in the way in which they observe Sunday.

We cannot, however, in the least agree to the principle on which this strictness is founded, and it is quite contrary to the spirit of the Catholic Church. Let us see what Our Lord Himself tells us in the Gospel. He begins by rebuking the over-strictness of the Pharisees: this He does over and over again, and to do it He even allowed Himself to be called a Sabbath breaker. He worked a number of miracles expressly to raise the question: "And the ruler of the synagogue, being angry that Jesus had healed on the Sabbath Day, answering, said to the multitude: Six days are there wherein you ought to work. In them come, and be healed, and not on the Sabbath Day. And the Lord, answering him, said: Ye hypocrites,

doth not every one of you, on the Sabbath Day, loose his ox or his ass from the manger and lead them to water? And ought not this daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo! these eighteen years, to be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath Day?" (Luke xiii. 14.)

Again, in another instance, the Jews said to him that was healed: "It is the Sabbath, it is not lawful for thee to take up thy bed. He answered them: He that made me whole, He said to me: Take up thy bed and walk" (John v. 10). Our Lord here did not scruple to tell the man to take up his bed and walk, although He knew that by doing so He would offend against the notions of the Pharisees. Again, when they "went through the corn on the Sabbath, His disciples, being hungry, began to pluck the ears and to eat. And the Pharisees, seeing them, said to Him: Behold, Thy disciples do that which it is not lawful to do on the Sabbath days" (Matt. xii. 1). But Our Lord defended their conduct, and it is remarkable that in every instance in which He spoke of the observance of the Sabbath Day, it was to condemn the exaggerated notions of the Jews.

Our Lord lays down two principles on which a reasonable observance of Sunday must be based: "And He said to them: The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath; therefore, the Son of man is Lord of the Sabbath also" (Mark ii. 27). "Made for man"—for all his reasonable wants of body and soul; and, therefore, any strictness which does not take these necessities into consideration is contrary to Our Lord's spirit: "Made for man," not for a few staid and devout people, but of the bulk of men—of hard-working laborers, and restless children; for people who require bodily rest and relaxation, and very often need exercise and amusement

quite as much. Our Lord's spirit would allow a reasonable scope for all these things.

But He says also: "The Son of man is the Lord of the Sabbath." It is His day, even when He allows us to use a part of it for our own purposes. From the beginning the Sunday has been called, *dies Dominica*, or the Lord's Day; this is the Church's name for it, and the name still lingers in most modern languages. It is His day; and we are to observe it, not according to any fancies of our own, but as we are directed to do by the Church, which speaks in His name, and which alone has authority in such matters.

The first Commandment of the Church is, "to keep the Sundays and Holydays of Obligation holy, by hearing Mass, and resting from servile works." We will begin with the obligation of resting from work on Sundays. This is the essential condition of the day: if you do not rest, and give up the ordinary toil of your life, the day becomes like all other days, and it is vain that you pretend to make it the Lord's Day. It is true that we may do servile work when it is *necessary*; but this plea of necessity is very often much abused. There are few things about which people make false consciences for themselves more easily, and we constantly see work done—and this even by good people—which is not really necessary.

It is not *necessary* to work on Sundays, merely because you can gain a little extra profit, or avoid a little trouble, or because you have not moral courage to refuse to do anything that you are asked. Sometimes, no doubt, a man's living depends on his being able to do certain work on Sundays, or he may be under very hard masters and in distress, so that he cannot help himself; but, generally speaking, people can have a good deal of their own

way, and can stand up very well for their rights and for what they want. If, then, they do not take the least trouble to keep Sunday free for the service of God, we cannot but suppose that in many cases it is not necessity, but indolence or indifference.

Again, it is not necessary for people to give large dinner parties, and receive visits, so as to make their servants work all Sunday. A great many rich people are very heedless in such things, and do not seem to trouble their consciences at all about the matter; everything that suits their convenience is a *necessity*. The Catechism says: "Parents, masters, and mistresses are strictly bound to provide that those under their charge shall hear Mass on Sundays and Holydays of Obligation;" and, in the same way, they are bound to give those under their control the opportunity of resting from all work not *really* necessary.

When Catholics are lax and negligent in this matter, they do incalculable harm, and are often a standing scandal: they are a scandal by leading others to neglect the observance of the Lord's Day, and, perhaps, to go much farther than they themselves do; and they are a scandal by giving occasion to the enemies of the Catholic Church to speak against her. In the great battle which is going on in these days between religion and irreligion, at least let us not be found on the enemy's side, strengthening his hands by our example.

The duty of Sunday, however, is not done simply by resting from work; we have, unfortunately, around us, the example of too many who rest from work, but are as far as possible from making it the Lord's Day. They make it the devil's day—a day of idleness and dissipation; on which, perhaps, they commit more sins than on any

other. It is, moreover, quite possible to observe the letter of the Church's commands, and yet violate the spirit of them. Let us see, then, what is the intention and meaning of this rest.

The Sunday ought to be, above all things, a day of recollection; the very object of its institution is to give us the opportunity to recollect ourselves, or, to use the expression of Holy Scripture, to "enter into ourselves." Our Lord calls upon us all, in the words of my text, to "come apart, into a desert place, and rest awhile;" that is, He tells all the busy, hard-working men of this world to leave their ordinary toil, however useful and important it may be, and take the rest needful for soul and body. He would have them leave their shops and counting-houses, and the care of their domestic concerns, to come and sit down for a little while in His company, that they may confer with Him about something more important than business, or family, or life itself.

He knows how difficult it is for any one, in the full tide of ordinary affairs, to think of his soul, and that, if he would know anything of his own state, it is absolutely necessary to retire a little from the crowd and "enter into himself." This is the beginning of every conversion. The prodigal son went on in his wanderings till he met with afflictions that compelled him to look at his own state, and, as soon as that was done, his return was comparatively easy; so it is that the weekly recollection of Sunday does so much, both for the perseverance of the good and the conversion of sinners.

You cannot, then, observe Sunday, according to the spirit of the Church, without giving some time to recollection of spirit—without going apart, for a while, with

Our Lord to listen to what He has to say to **you**; and every arrangement of Sunday which does not include this is a faulty one. You ought not habitually to allow yourself either occupations or amusements which are inconsistent with the necessary degree of recollection; nay, even frequent visits to the Church should not be allowed to interfere with this interior spirit. You find people sometimes who are very fond of attending many public devotions, and visiting many churches, and yet contrive to be very seldom alone with God.

Our Lord says: "When thou shalt pray, enter into thy chamber, and, having shut the door, pray to thy Father in secret, and thy Father, who seeth in secret, will repay thee" (Matt. vi. 6). These words refer principally to that mental recollection which is the very essence of prayer. We may shut the doors of our hearts, and be alone with God, and pray to Him in secret in the midst of a crowd, as truly as we could in the desert; but still the words seem to point to the advantage of some kind of home devotion, where people literally shut their doors and pray in secret, or, at any rate, do something in the way of retirement and recollection.

This, then, ought to be the spirit of the Christian Sunday. It is Our Lord's Day—a day for seeking Him in church and in His Sacraments—a day for listening to His words both externally and in our own hearts—a day especially when we seek His company by interior recollection, and desire to go apart with Him, and "rest awhile" from the ordinary concerns of life. This is the idea of Sunday which you should impress on your households; not merely that there are certain duties of absolute obligation which, before all things, they must be careful to ~~stand~~ to, but that they are to observe the spirit of



the day honestly and generously, so as to make it truly the Lord's Day.

In saying this, I do not mean to find fault with innocent amusements; recreations, followed in a right spirit, may be made the service of God, and "the Sabbath is made for man." Our Lord sympathizes with all our feelings. He "knows what is in man," and He does not grudge us a reasonable portion of the time He has taken for Himself—nay, if young people occasionally take an unreasonable part of it, and, now and then, spend a large part of the day in taking fresh air and exercise, which they cannot otherwise get, I do not think He will be offended—if they are careful in hearing Mass—provided that, as a rule and habitually, they keep Sunday in a right spirit, and give their time and service generously to Him.

And now let us consider how we are to practice this recollection of mind, of which I have been speaking. Meditation, or mental prayer, is the most efficacious of all the ways by which we can enter into ourselves. It was the favorite devotion of the saints, by which they were kept constantly full and overflowing, with the fervor that appeared in every word and action. It was, in particular, the special devotion of St. Ignatius, and his principal instrument in the conversion of sinners, and the sanctification of souls. No habits of sin, no coldness of heart, can long resist good meditations. "My heart grew hot within me, and in my meditation a fire shall flame out" (Ps. xxxviii. 4). This flame, of which the Psalmist speaks, is powerful enough to consume all the obstacles that come between us and our sanctification.

To meditate, you require three things—to dwell upon the presence of God; to be for a sufficient time alone



with Him in heart; and to speak to Him in your words; all the rest comes of itself. Our danger is that we are so near to God, and yet so far off from Him. "In Him we live, and move, and have our being," and yet He may often say of us as of the Jews: "This people honoreth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me." It will always be so, unless we take some special pains to think of God's presence, and to present ourselves in spirit before Him. Our Lord is near to us, and yet we do not see Him, and cannot hear His voice, because the glare and the tumult of this world come between us and Him; and it is the work of meditation to put these aside for a moment, that we may be face to face with our Creator, and obtain from Him the graces we most need.

One of the best practices for reminding us of the presence of God is spiritual reading, and this is a subject to which I would call your special attention. It would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of pious reading, and the lives of the saints are full of its effects.

Spiritual reading is important, because it is the easiest way of coming into God's presence by recollection. Many people find it hard to make a regular meditation—their thoughts wander, and they grow weary: but no one can really say that it is difficult to spend a short time in reading a book, and following the thoughts it suggests. You have no method to learn, and require no practice: you are not obliged to leave your home, or your own room; and yet you have a powerful means of raising your heart to God, or, we may say, God speaks to you through the pages of your book.

Some such exercise is necessary for a Christian life. If you have not something to keep up the store of good

Thoughts and feelings within you, you cannot expect to persevere in prayer. You hear people complaining of dryness and indevotion: they cannot pray, their minds suggest no good thoughts, they have nothing to say, and they cannot keep their attention. Is this wonderful if they do nothing to replenish the store of good within them? At the present day a certain amount of religious reading is particularly necessary. People read a great deal at the present day, but the greater part of the literature which surrounds us leads to dissipation of mind, and it is sometimes very dangerous. Besides this, we are surrounded by active and jealous Protestants, who spare no pains in putting forward their own particular views: they are, of course, quite ignorant of the Catholic faith, and proportionately bitter against it. All this, day after day, cannot fail to have an effect, as the dropping of water on a stone, unless we do something systematically to counteract it; and there is nothing better fitted for the purpose than regular religious reading.

Such reading, then, ought to have a distinct place in the Sunday duty of every Catholic household; it should be impressed on all young people that some devout reading must form a part of every well spent Sunday. Many seem to think, at the present day, that when they have heard Mass they have nothing more to do, but that they may read novels and amuse themselves all day long.

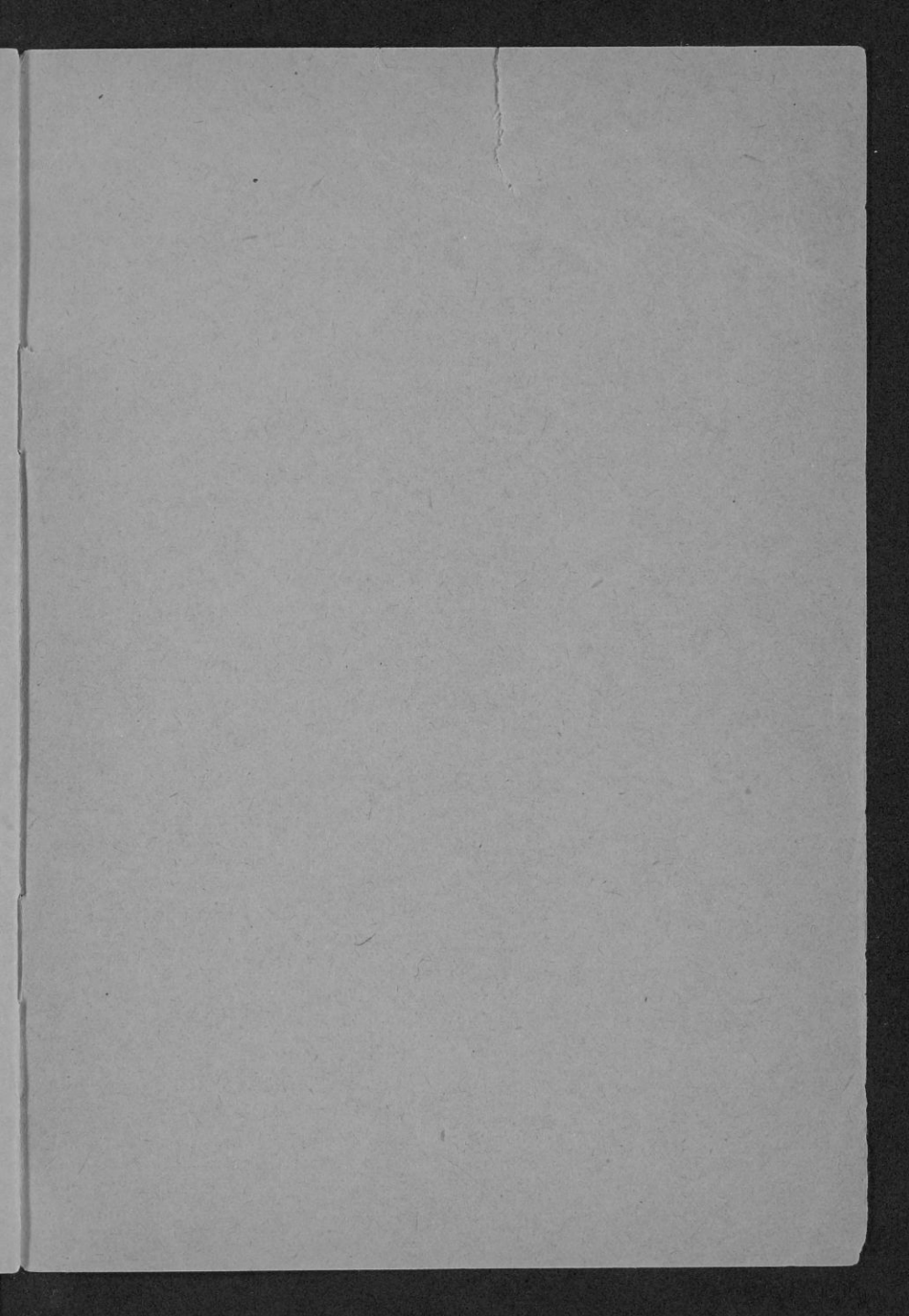
This is clearly defective training; it is not perhaps, that they want to do wrong, but they have been brought up with a lax idea of their duty, and they do not rightly understand what is meant by giving a good day's service to Almighty God.

Years ago, at the beginning of the present century, our Catholic people seem to have had a much greater

zeal for religious reading, and we owe to them many of the most valuable books now in use; but the practice of pious reading seems rather to have gone out of fashion, and it ought to be the earnest wish of all good Catholics to revive it.

The reading ought to be of two kinds—instructive and devotional. We hardly realize how much most people need instruction; many, perhaps, learned their faith in childhood, and have studied it very little since, so it is not wonderful that their knowledge should sometimes be imperfect. It is one of the objects of Sunday to keep up an accurate knowledge of the faith, and there is no way in which it can be done more effectually than by spiritual reading. It is not too much to say that anyone who gave half an hour every Sunday to some course of instruction, as well as devotion, could not fail to know his duty.

The books to be read are the Holy Scriptures, the lives of the saints, sermons, instructions and meditations. We need to read a great deal about the life of Our Lord in the New Testament, as well as such books as the *Imitation of Christ* and others, that put His doctrine and example before us. Many other kinds of reading are also necessary. For this reason the book racks were introduced into our churches. They offer an abundance of reading matter at a low price. We should earnestly coöperate in the spread of Catholic reading for the spiritual benefit both of ourselves and of others.



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