

What Are the Rules, Anyway?

Have you ever found yourself doing something by rote or routine, even though it makes no sense to do it that way? I often think about this whenever I open the dishwasher. It is usually much better for me to have a totally empty dishwasher. Then, I can load this thing the way it is supposed to be loaded. Also, I like to partially rinse the dishes. This is something we were “trained” to do at my parents house because they did it this way at my grandparents house.

We know that there is no right way to load the dishwasher. One of my friends from the neighborhood in Pittsfield posted, and I am paraphrasing, “In every relationship there is one person who stacks the dishwasher like a Scandinavian architect and one who stacks in like a rabid raccoon.” Do you load a dishwasher like a Scandinavian architect, a rabid raccoon, or something in between? Show of hands?

Here is the catch—there are no official rules for how to load or stack the dishwasher. There might be some guidelines out there, and some may think they know more about it than anyone else, but there are still no official rules. Just our interpretations of how it is best

accomplished. It is not unlike what Jesus found that day in the Temple. The Pharisees thought they had the answers to how the Sabbath should be celebrated. Jesus wanted them to look at it differently. Not exactly Scandinavian architects versus rabid raccoons, but you get what is coming.

Let's take a look at the Pharisees. The actions of some Pharisees gave them all a bad name. But, the "good" Pharisees were dedicated to a strict adherence to the law. Some, however, were quick to point out the faults of others while refusing to look within themselves. For example, the early part of the Gospel reading talks about how David and those who accompanied him had to pick something to eat on the Sabbath. Normally, all food preparation was completed before the start of the Sabbath so that no one had to work. (Folks of a certain age, how many Sunday dinners did you have to cook?) But if anything was done on the Sabbath outside of praying, the general populations risked the fact the Pharisees would call them on it.

When Jesus pointed this out to them, they grumbled. When Jesus blatantly told that man to hold out his arm, they were absolutely furious.

How could they allow for Jesus to “break” the Sabbath rules. Should Jesus have allowed the man to continue to suffer? Or did Jesus do the right thing in healing the man? I don’t think that anyone here is going to doubt the work of the Messiah.

How many of us have had to work on Sunday? If you had parents who worked as firefighters, police officers, ministers, doctors, nurses, hospital personnel you know that they went off to work on Sundays and holidays—even on Christmas and Thanksgiving. My own mother would have to choose between Christmas Eve or Christmas Day. She also worked every other Sunday. You see, not everyone had the choice to have the normal “Blue Laws” Sunday. Ministers, Church Musicians, and Sextons have always worked on Sundays.

Jesus simply pointed out that sometimes things had to happen on the Sabbath. Lives would need to be saved, people would have to work (i.e., cook or pull a plant—exert some sort of energy) in order to survive. The Sabbath was established so that people would have a chance to worship AND to rest from their labor. Even in 2024, we come together on the Sabbath (most churches from 4pm the day before through

sometime on Sunday) to worship God, hear the Sacred Scriptures, and interact with their church community. While we don't recommend that you schedule major construction projects on the Sabbath, we do what we have to do in order to survive.

Each one of us has to determine our own set of rules as to how we can legitimately keep holy the Sabbath day, be it on Sunday when folks have the chance, or on another day when Sunday does not allow for it to happen. So, my Scandinavian architects, rabid raccoons, and everyone in between, let us be careful to not exert undue authority over rules that are not put down in writing. There are not set rules for how to load that dishwasher. There are no set rules for how we are to keep the Sabbath Day holy. Let us encourage each other to be true to observe a Sabbath day that is appropriate for each person in his/her/their own relationship with God. Let us come to this table to share in the sacrament that provides us with spiritual nourishment to do so.