

NEW ZEALAND LOCAL PAGES

LEADERSHIP MESSAGE

Honouring the Sabbath and Observing the Sacrament

By Elder James J. Hamula
Of the Seventy

Nearly a year ago, my wife and I returned to the United States after five years of service in the Pacific Area. I served in the Area Presidency; Sister Hamula was my beloved companion, and mother to the three children who accompanied us. During our five years in the Pacific Area, Sister Hamula and I, accompanied on occasion by our children, visited you and your beautiful

islands many times. Every time we visited you, we were graciously received and generously treated. Indeed, we were always treated far better than we deserved. But we learned that is the way of the people of the Pacific—showering those who visit you with love.

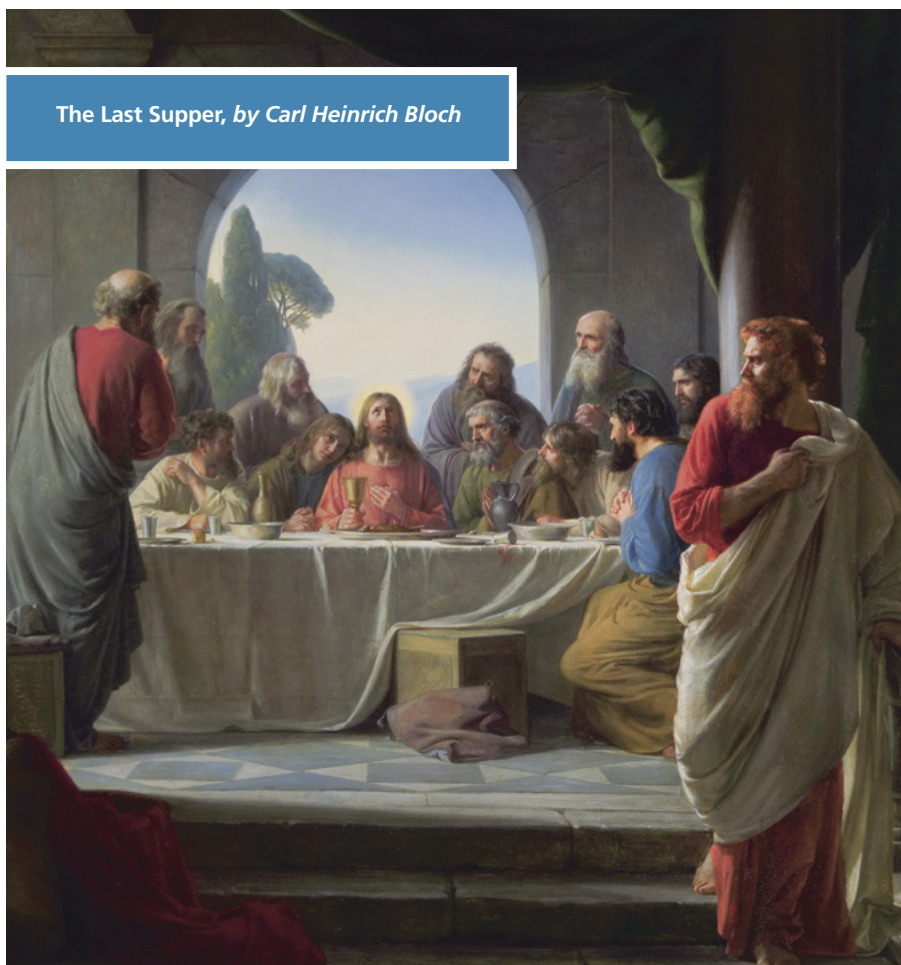
Speaking for our family, I express our deepest love and gratitude to you.

Being with you enriched our lives forever. You taught us to love generously, to live simply, and to be always grateful and forever hopeful. Indeed, you taught us how to be happy in life. From you we learned that happy people do not have the best of everything; they make the best of whatever they have. And that is what we saw among you whenever we were with you.

During our time with you, we observed not only how you love those who visit you from afar, but how you love those among you who are in need. We observed how you responded to your fellow islanders in Ha'apai, Tonga, with donations of food and supplies after they were devastated by a monstrous cyclone. We again observed how you responded to your fellow islanders in Vanuatu with more donations of food and supplies after they were devastated by another monstrous cyclone. On the islands of the sea, you know how fragile and tenuous life can be. And that knowledge makes you quick to respond to the needs of your fellowman who may be in distress, and never cease looking heavenward for protection and salvation from our Heavenly Father.



Elder James J.
Hamula



The Last Supper, by Carl Heinrich Bloch



Regarding the Sabbath, God has invited us to dedicate one day in seven to “rest” from our daily activities.

Today, I wish to speak about two vital principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ which, if earnestly and consistently lived, will bring protection and salvation to you, no matter how fierce the storms of life may be. These two principles are faithful honoring of the Sabbath and earnest observance of the ordinance of the sacrament.

Honouring the Sabbath

From the beginning, our Father in Heaven set aside a Sabbath and commanded that it be kept holy. In Genesis we read:

“And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he

rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made.

“And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it” (Genesis 2:2–3).

Although we have no evidence of Sabbath observance prior to Moses, this is no doubt due to the scantiness of the scriptural record. The Sabbath is an eternal principle and therefore must have existed from the days of Adam, whenever the gospel was on the earth among men.

The eternal principle of the Sabbath was declared to Moses. On Mount Sinai, God commanded Moses and the children of Israel as follows:

“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.

“Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work:

“But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work . . .

“For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it” (Exodus 20:8–11).

Subsequently, God taught Moses and the children of Israel that the Sabbath was a perpetual covenant between them. “Verily my sabbaths

ye shall keep,” the Lord told the children of Israel, “for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the Lord that doth sanctify you. . . .

“Wherefore [you] shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout [your] generations, for a perpetual covenant” (Exodus 31:13, 16).

In what way is the Sabbath a perpetual covenant? A covenant is a sacred agreement between God and man. God sets the terms of the agreement, and promises certain outcomes for obeying the terms of the agreement. Man is permitted to enter into the agreement freely. When man obeys the terms of the agreement, God fulfills His promises. When man does not obey the terms of the agreement, he is left to himself and receives not the promises of God.

Regarding the Sabbath, God has invited us to dedicate one day in seven to “rest” from our daily activities. Literally, *sabbath* means “rest.” On this day of rest, God asks that we set aside our daily work and activities to remember Him—remember His creation of us and the world in which we now live, and remember His work to sanctify, or save, us from physical and spiritual death. On this day of rest, God expects that we will use the day to rededicate ourselves to Him and the covenants we have made with Him, and to serve Him by serving His children.

Whether and how we keep the Sabbath day is a sign to God regarding our acceptance of and obedience to His plan for our salvation. If we keep and honour the Sabbath, it is a sign to God that we accept Him as our Creator, our Father, our God, and that we are willing to follow His laws and precepts that are prerequisite to our eternal salvation. If we do not keep and honour the Sabbath, it is a sign to God that we have decided to accept other gods—the god of pleasure, the god of business, the god of self-centeredness, or any one of the many other gods of this world. In short, whether or not we keep and honour the Sabbath is a sign to God our Father of whether or not we wish to be His disciples and the beneficiaries of His rich blessings.

And how abundant and rich are God’s blessings to those who choose to follow Him! To those who keep and honour the Sabbath, God says:

“I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit.

“. . . Ye shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely.

“And I will give [you] peace in the land, and ye shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid. . . .

“For I will have respect unto you, and make you fruitful, and multiply you. . . .

“And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people” (Leviticus 26:4–6, 9, 12).

Fruitful land, full storehouses, safety and peace, and the presence of God among us—can there be any greater promises to man, particularly to those who dwell on the isles of the sea?

But there is more. To those who keep and honour the Sabbath, God promises to “make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar” (Isaiah 56:7). In other words, God promises those who keep and honour the Sabbath that He will hear and answer their prayers and accept their offerings and sacrifices made in His name. Brothers and sisters, for what do you pray? For what do you hope in exchange for your offerings and sacrifices to the Lord? God promises that such prayers and hopes will be fulfilled if we keep and honour the Sabbath. Surely such a promise makes the Sabbath keeper “joyful in [the] house of prayer”!

And yet God promises even more to those who keep and honour the Sabbath. “Unto them,” God says, “will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off. . . . Even them will I bring to my holy mountain” (Isaiah

56:5, 7). Such language is deeply and extraordinarily meaningful; it represents God's promise to bring each who keeps and honours the Sabbath into His own celestial home and to provide each there a place and a name never to be lost. Brothers and sisters, there is no greater promise than this. It is the promise of exaltation and eternal life!

To claim such blessings, how should we keep and honour the Sabbath? In ancient times, God designated the Sabbath to be held on the seventh day of the week, Saturday, in commemoration of the Creation. After the coming of Jesus Christ, however, the Sabbath was designated by the Lord to be held on "the first day of the week," Sunday, in commemoration of the Atonement of Jesus Christ (see Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2; Revelation 1:10). As important as creation is in the plan of salvation, it is the Atonement of Jesus Christ—finally accomplished on the first day of the week, or Sunday—that saves all of creation and is now to be commemorated.

That Sunday should be kept as the Lord's Sabbath was confirmed by the Lord in modern revelation. On August 7, 1831, which was a Sunday, the Lord spoke to the Prophet Joseph Smith, saying:

"This [day] is a day appointed unto you to rest from your labors, and to pay thy devotions unto the Most High . . .

“ . . . Remember that on this, the Lord's day [or Sunday], thou shalt offer thine oblations and thy sacraments unto the Most High” (D&C 59:10, 12).

And shortly thereafter, the Lord reiterated to His modern-day disciples the eternal command regarding the keeping of the Sabbath. Said He, "The inhabitants of Zion shall . . . observe the Sabbath day to keep it holy" (D&C 68:29).

If Sunday is the day we should keep as the Sabbath, how are we to honour the Sabbath? How are we to keep the Sabbath day holy? In the same way that God set the Sabbath apart from all other of His days, we too should set it apart from all other of our days. Making the Sabbath different from all other days begins by doing what the Lord told ancient Israel and what He reiterated to Joseph Smith. "Rest from your labors," He told Joseph Smith (D&C 59:10; see also Exodus 35:2), meaning set aside the work of your everyday lives. What should we do instead of our daily work? The Lord told Joseph Smith, "Go to the house of prayer" (D&C 59:9), meaning attend your Church meetings. And what should we do in the Lord's house of prayer? Again, the Lord told Joseph Smith, "Offer thine oblations and thy sacraments unto the Most High" (D&C 59:12), meaning give yourselves to the Lord in service and participate earnestly in the ordinance of the sacrament.



God promises those who keep and honour the Sabbath that He will hear and answer their prayers and accept their offerings and sacrifices made in His name.



Thus, resting from our labours, attending our Church meetings, giving diligent service and partaking of the sacrament are essential elements of honouring the Sabbath. Beyond these things, however, are there other things we should do? Are there things we should not do? Let me quote Elder Russell M. Nelson, who addressed this issue in a recent general conference of the Church. “In my much younger years,” Elder Nelson said, “I studied the work of others who had compiled lists of things to do and things *not* to do on the Sabbath. It wasn’t until later that I learned from the scriptures that my conduct and my attitude on the Sabbath constituted a *sign* between me and my Heavenly Father [see Exodus 31:13; Ezekiel 20:12, 20]. With that understanding, I no longer needed lists of dos and don’ts. When I had to make a decision whether or not an activity was appropriate for the Sabbath, I simply asked myself, ‘What *sign* do I want to give to God?’ That question made my choices about the Sabbath day crystal clear.”¹ I commend this counsel to each of you in your varied circumstances. When faced with a decision on what you should or should not do on the Sabbath, ask yourself what sign you wish to give to God, and then act accordingly.

One of the great features of life in the Pacific is how the Sabbath has traditionally been honoured. Daily work

is set aside. Everyone attends church in his or her best dress. And choirs and congregations can be heard singing in the village. But during the five years I served in the Pacific, I saw Sabbath day traditions slowly changing. I saw more and more stores opening for business. I saw more and more people shopping on the Sabbath. And I saw more and more people fishing, working in their fields, and recreating on the Sabbath. In short, I could see the Sabbath being abandoned and treated like any other day of the week. I could see more and more people signifying by their conduct that they were focused more on themselves and their own pleasures and needs rather than on God and His work.

Brothers and sisters, I urge you today to renew your commitment to keeping and honouring the Sabbath. Make the Sabbath a day you give to God. Make it a day on which you show God your love for Him, your gratitude for His many blessings, and your faith in the power and promise of His salvation. Make it a day on which you *do* worthy and holy things. Merely abstaining from work and recreation, and sleeping much of the day, is not keeping or honouring the Sabbath. Study the gospel. Teach it to your children. Minister to the poor and the needy. Repair broken relationships. Gather family names and prepare them for temple work. In short, make

your Sabbath day activities an outward sign of your inward commitment to and gratitude for God and His redemptive work in the earth. Improve your Sabbath day observance, and claim for yourselves the matchless blessings God has promised to those who keep and honour His Sabbath!

Observing the Sacrament

Now, one of the most important things we can do to keep and honour the Sabbath is to more earnestly and faithfully participate in the ordinance of the sacrament. Indeed, it is a commandment of the Lord that, on the Sabbath, we perform and participate in this sacred ordinance. Said He, “Thou shalt . . . offer up thy sacraments upon my holy day” (D&C 59:9). From this we may appropriately conclude that we cannot keep the Sabbath day holy unless we earnestly and faithfully participate in the ordinance of the sacrament.

What is it about the sacrament that makes it so important—indeed, so central—to proper Sabbath day observance? Brothers and sisters, let us remember that the fundamental purpose of the Sabbath is for us to pause from our daily labours and remember God—remember both His creation and His work to sanctify, or save, all of creation. To that sacred end, the ordinance of the sacrament was instituted to facilitate not only our remembrance

but also our acceptance of the supreme act of God's salvation of the world—that being the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Thus, when we earnestly and faithfully participate in the ordinance of the sacrament, we are fulfilling the very purpose of the Sabbath.

The ordinance of the sacrament has been called “one of the most holy and sacred ordinances in the Church.”² It needs to become more holy and sacred to each of us. On the eve of Gethsemane and Calvary, Jesus instituted the ordinance of the sacrament. With His Apostles, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “Take, eat” (Matthew 26:26). “This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19). In a similar manner, He took a cup of wine, offered a blessing on it, and passed it to His Apostles, saying, “This cup is the new testament in my blood” (Luke 22:20), “which is shed . . . for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26:28). “This do in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19).

In this simple yet profound manner, Jesus taught His disciples then, and all of His disciples since then, how to remember and honour His redemption of us and how we may avail ourselves of that redemption. With torn and broken bread, we signify that we remember the physical body of Jesus Christ—a body that was buffeted with pains, afflictions, and temptations of

every kind, a body that bore a burden of anguish sufficient to bleed at every pore, a body whose flesh was torn and whose heart was broken in crucifixion. We signify our belief that while that same body was laid to rest in death, it was raised again to life from the grave, never again to know disease, decay, or death. And in taking the bread to ourselves, we acknowledge that, like Christ's mortal body, our bodies will be released from the bonds of death, rise triumphantly from the grave, and be restored to our eternal spirits.

With a small cup of water, we signify that we remember the blood Jesus spilled and the spiritual suffering He endured for all mankind. We remember the agony that caused great drops of blood to fall in Gethsemane. We remember the bruising and scourging He endured at the hands of His captors. We remember the blood He spilled from His hands, feet, and side while at Calvary. And we remember His personal reflection on His suffering: “How sore you know not, how exquisite you know not, yea, how hard to bear you know not” (D&C 19:15). In taking the water to ourselves, we acknowledge that His blood and suffering atoned for our sins and that He will remit our sins as we embrace and accept the principles and ordinances of His gospel.

Thus, with bread and water, we are reminded of Christ's redemption of

us from death and sin. Through the sacramental prayers, we express our acceptance of His redemption and solemnly commit to avail ourselves of that redemption. In our petition to God, our Eternal Father, we declare that we will “always remember” His precious Son. In the blessing on the bread, we express our willingness to remember; in the blessing on the water, we declare that we “do” remember (compare D&C 20:77 and 20:79). In so declaring, we make a solemn commitment to God, our Father, to exercise faith in Jesus Christ and in His redemption of us from death and sin.

We further declare that we will “keep his commandments.” That is a solemn commitment to repent. If our thoughts, words, or actions have been less than what they should have been in days past, we recommit ourselves to more closely align our lives with His in days to come.

Next, we declare that we “are willing to take upon [us] the name of [the] Son.” That is a solemn commitment to submit ourselves to His authority and to do His work, which includes receiving for ourselves every saving ordinance and covenant and making such ordinances and covenants available to others through our service in the Lord's Church.

When we commit ourselves to these principles, we are promised in the sacramental prayers that we



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will “have his Spirit to be with [us].” Receiving anew the Spirit is a consummate blessing. It is the Spirit who cleanses and purifies us from sin and transgression. Only those who are so cleansed and purified can ultimately dwell in the presence of God. Thus, qualifying for receipt of the Spirit through the ordinance of baptism, or renewal of the Spirit through the ordinance of the sacrament, is imperative to our final salvation.

Brothers and sisters, the most important event in time and eternity is the Atonement of Jesus Christ. He who accomplished the Atonement gave us the ordinance of the sacrament to help us not only remember but also claim the

blessings of this supreme act of grace. Will you please consider whether, during the administration of the sacrament, you are remembering and claiming the blessings of the Atonement in your life? When you say amen to the blessing of the bread and the water, do you know what you are committing to? When you receive the bread and the water, do you know what you are signifying to God? While you are waiting for the sacrament to be administered to others, are you reflecting gratefully on the life and ministry of Jesus Christ? Are you reflecting on your own life and what might need to be improved? Are you making commitments to do and be better? Are you renewing your faith

in Christ, rekindling your love for Him and His ministry, and deepening your gratitude for His salvation? Do you feel the Spirit of the Lord as a result of your participation in the administration of the sacrament?

When Jesus entered into Gethsemane to commence the work of the Atonement, He took with Him a number of His disciples. Of them Jesus asked that they “watch and pray” (Matthew 26:41). Later, Jesus returned to find them asleep. “Couldst not thou watch one hour?” He asked (Mark 14:37). “Rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation,” Jesus admonished (Luke 22:46). This exchange is instructive for us. The Lord has asked



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us to watch and pray as His sacrifice of body and blood are remembered in the sacrament. Are we, like His disciples at the garden, falling asleep? Can we not watch and remember and reflect for a few minutes, let alone an hour? Let us rise out of any thoughtless stupor or trivial distraction of which we might be guilty during our participation in the Lord's Supper, and pray in genuine remembrance and gratitude for the salvation of our souls. In so doing, we will be better equipped to fend off the temptations of the world.

My brothers and sisters, I pray that we may more faithfully keep and honour the Sabbath day and more earnestly observe the Lord's sacrament on the Sabbath day. Doing so will strengthen

faith in our Father in Heaven and in His Son, Jesus Christ. Doing so will also qualify us for the rich blessings of heaven in time and eternity, even the blessings of eternal life. I bear witness of the Father and the Son; of Their infinite love, mercy and grace extended to all Their children; and of the marvellous

blessings that come to all who faithfully keep the Lord's Sabbath and receive the Lord's sacrament. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. Russell M. Nelson, "The Sabbath Is a Delight," *Ensign*, May 2015, 130.
2. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Fielding Smith* (2013), 96.

LOCAL PAGES

Your local pages section is produced by members in your own area under the guidance of the Area Presidency so that it can address the needs and experiences of members where you live. The inclusion of the local pages in each issue depends on the availability of local content. We invite you to contribute your faith-promoting thoughts and experiences by contacting your local editor at: ensign-nz@ldschurch.org ■