

SATURDAY

The seventh day of the week, the day on which Christ's body rested in the tomb. The early Christians of Jewish origin continued to observe Saturday as the Sabbath, a day of rest and prayer. But the fact that the Resurrection and [descent](#) of the [Holy Ghost](#) on the apostles had taken place on the first day of the week soon led to the observance of that day (see SUNDAY).

Soon the observance of Saturday was regarded as a sign of imparting a Jewish character to Christianity (Col. 2:16; Epistle of Ignatius to the Magnesians 9 and Epistle to Diognetus 4, in Jurgens, 1970, pp. 62, 26). This motivated the Council of Laodicea (343-381) to legislate Canon 29, saying, "Christians must not Judaize by resting on the Sabbath, but must work on that day, rather honoring the Lord's Day, and if they can, resting then as Christians. But if any shall be found to be Judaizers, let them be anathema from Christ."

Fasting Day

In the East, Saturday is still, as in early times, treated as a festal day, except in regard to the cessation of work, and is characterized by the absence of fasting and by standing in prayer.

The West, on the contrary, especially Rome, in protest against the Judaization of Christianity, observed the seventh day of the week as a fast day, like Friday. This is noted by Socrates, who said, "At Rome they fast every Saturday." And from Saint Augustine's letter 36, it appears that he fasted on Saturday and regarded this the regular and proper course to be pursued.

It appears from a remark of Saint Jerome that the Saturday fast was known in Rome as early as the beginning of the third century, for he said that Hippolytus discussed the question of the Saturday fast and of a daily

reception of the Eucharist. Tertullian (c. 160-225), however, writing on fasting condemned this practice, calling the Sabbath “a day never to be kept as fast except at the Passover Season.” In more recent times, the Saturday fast in the West became restricted to Italy, where it was eventually abolished in 1918.

The Eastern tradition agrees with [Apostolic Canon](#) 66, which decrees, “If any of the clergy be found fasting on the Lord’s day, or on the Sabbath, excepting the one only, let him be deposed. If a layman, let him be excommunicated.”

Similarly the APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTIONS state, “But keep the Sabbath and the Lord’s day festival, because the former is the memorial of the creation, and the latter of the resurrection. But there is one only Sabbath to be observed by you in the whole year, which is that of our Lord’s burial, on which men ought to keep a fast, but not a festival.” They also say, “He appointed us to break our fast on the seventh day at the cock-crowing, but to fast on the Sabbath-day.

Not that the Sabbath-day is a day of fasting, being the rest from the creation, but because we ought to fast on this one Sabbath only, while on this day the Creator was under the earth.” Pope CHRISTODOULUS (1046-1077) affirmed the same rule in Canon 19: “And it is not allowed to any of the faithful to fast on a Saturday, except on one Saturday in the whole year, and this is the Great Saturday which is the end of the fast.”

A Day of Worship

The Constitutions of the Holy Apostles (Book 5, Section 3) give an injunction: “Every Sabbath-day excepting one, and every Lord’s day, hold your solemn assemblies and rejoice.”

Similarly, the Arabic Didascalia ([William](#) S. Qeladah, 1979, chap. 10) commands, “Assemble ye each day in the Church especially on Saturday

and the Resurrection day which is Sunday.” It also says (chap. 38), “[The Holy Bread](#) shall be offered on Saturday and Sunday.” Likewise, the ninety-third of the canons attributed to Saint Athanasius says, “O my beloved. None of the priests or the Christians shall be neglected of the Sacraments [anaphoras] on the Sabbath and Sunday” (Riedel and Crum, 1904, p. 60).

The Saturday service, however, was not universally liturgical. Down to the fifth century, the Divine Liturgy was not celebrated on Saturday at Rome or Alexandria. This was noted by Socrates: “For although almost all churches throughout the world celebrate the sacred mysteries on the Sabbath of every week, yet the Christians of Alexandria and at Rome, on account of some ancient tradition, have ceased to do this.” But he added, “The Egyptians in the [neighborhood](#) of Alexandria, and the inhabitants of Thebais, hold their religious assemblies on the Sabbath, but do not participate of the mysteries in the manner usual among Christians in general, for after having eaten and satisfied themselves with food of all kinds, in the evening making the offerings [celebrating the Eucharist] they partake of the mysteries” (1979, p. 132).

Certain instructions were given as to the observance of Saturday and the manner of conducting its service, whether [liturgical](#) or nonliturgical. “The Gospels are to be read on the Sabbath with the other scriptures” (Canons of the Synod Held in the City of Laodicea). Hence, the Constitutions of the Holy Apostles say, “Let slaves work five days; but on the Sabbath-day and the Lord’s day let them have leisure to go to church for instruction in piety. We have said that the Sabbath is an account of the creation, and the Lord’s day of the resurrection.”

The biographies of Coptic monks, anchorites, and bishops often record the custom of assembling [on Saturdays](#) and Sundays for the synaxes and Holy Communion. Saint PAPHNUTIUS the hermit said that Saint Onophrius and the anchorites in the desert used to “partake of the Sacrament on the Sabbath Day and on the First day of the week, through

an angel of [God](#) who cometh and administereth the Sacrament to every one who is in the desert, and who liveth there for God's sake and who seeth no man" (Budge, 1914, pp. 464, 470).

Saturday During Lent

Canon 49 of the Council of Laodicea decrees, "During Lent, the Bread must not be offered except on the Sabbath Day and on the Lord's Day only." This rule is still observed by the Syrians, Armenians, and Greeks, but not the Copts. Also "The Nativities of the Martyrs are not to be celebrated in Lent, but commemorations of the holy Martyrs are to be made on the Sabbaths and Lord's days" (Canon 51).

In view of the eucharistic character of Saturday, Patriarch Timothy of Alexandria (380-385) stated that it is a day of abstention from the conjugal act.

Similarly SAWIRUS IBN AL-MUQAFFA', bishop of Ashmunayn (tenth century), in the eighth treatise of his *Al-Durr al-Thamin*, condemned those who think that Saturday and Sundays of Lent are not counted among the forty holy days that the Lord fasted and accordingly abstain from the conjugal act on all the days of the fast except Saturdays and Sundays.

Ritual Notes

The Coptic church nowadays observes Saturday as a festal day on which fasts and prostrations are prohibited all the year round except Holy Saturday, which is to be fasted. But the Divine Liturgy on Holy Saturday is celebrated early in the morning, and not at noon as it should be according to the ritual rule. Hence, most communicants do break the fast by taking a drink of water immediately after communion.

During fasting seasons, Saturdays and Sundays are not to be observed

with complete abstinence but only from animal products, according to the rules and customs of fasting. Fish is allowed in some fasts, namely the Fast of Advent, the Fast of the Apostles, and the Fast of the Virgin. Hence, fish is also allowed on Saturday and Sundays that fall in the above three fasts. But it is not allowed [on Saturdays](#) and Sundays included in other fasts, namely, the PARAMONE day of Christmas and Epiphany, and the fifty-five days of Lent. In Ethiopia, however, fish is not to be eaten on any of the fast days of the year.

Although few cathedrals and large churches have a daily celebration of the Divine Liturgy, the usual practice in most churches is to avoid celebrating it on Saturday except on rare occasions, such as feasts of particular importance in the calendar and funerals.

Even during Lent most churches in Egypt have a daily celebration of the liturgy (at noon), except on Saturday. In case of necessity, the liturgy is to be celebrated [on Saturdays](#) of Lent early in the morning, and some of the hymns and prayers of the PSALMODIA and the liturgy are to be sung to a special tone for Saturdays and Sundays of Lent.

The evening being an end to the work of the day, and Saturday being an end to the cycle of the week, both symbolize the end of earthly life. Thus, the Intercession for the Dead is to be said at the evening raising of incense every day, while the prayers for the sick, for travelers, or for the sacrifices are to be said at the morning raising of incense.

But on Saturday, being the day on which the Lord rested in the tomb, the prayer for the faithful departed is to be said at both the evening and morning services of raising of incense. At present, there are exceptions to this rule during the Paschaltide and the feasts of the Lord (and Sunday evening according to a variant tradition), where the prayer of the dead is not to be said in the evening raising of incense nor on Saturday in the morning raising of incense. Hence, the prayer for the sick is to be said instead.

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