



PORTSMOUTH ABBEY

**April 2016**

**Vol. XXXVII No. 4**

**Dear Oblates and Friends of Portsmouth,**

**“Remember thou keep holy the Sabbath.”** This is the third commandment in the Mosaic Decalogue and one that is in need of reviewing in the light of how diminished its observance is in our increasingly secularized culture. Many Catholics no longer feel attendance at Sunday mass is of obligation even though it has been made so accessible with the Saturday evening option. Young people are following the example of their parents in avoiding this responsibility and congregations in many churches are becoming too few to sustain their continued existence. The frequency of the closing of parish churches adds to the problem of fulfilling the duty of Sunday observance, further reducing this crucial demonstration of Catholic identity. Even **christening** a child is no longer held to be the necessity it once was, with many young parents preferring to let the child make the decision when he can choose rationally. If there is a child to be christened, it is often at the insistence of the *grandparents* rather than because the parents are very much concerned; they seem to be more interested in the occasion as an excuse for a reunion of friends and family, rather than in a deeply spiritual event in the life of the child as the time of its formal entry into the Church of Christ.

For those who still recognize the importance of attendance at mass on Sundays and holy days, it is worth our while to consider the role it plays in our daily lives and what the day and the mass signify. The first thing to note is that there is a tendency to confuse the Jewish word, ***Sabbath***, with the Christian term, ***Sunday, or Lord’s Day***, as it is called more accurately in some languages. The confusion probably stems from our common adherence to the Ten Commandments, one of which contains the obligation *to keep holy the Sabbath*. And in this respect we as well as the whole human race share in the necessity of worshipping our Creator, the one God. But there is an essential difference between

Jew and Christian. **For the Jews**, the final day of the week of creation is commemorated, when God **rested** on the **7<sup>th</sup> day** of the week, and the people in turn took this as a day of refraining from labor in order to spend it in giving thanks to God in appropriate ways. These ways gradually became more elaborate as Temple worship grew and interpretation of the Law developed under the aegis of the Scribes and Pharisees.

The **Book of Deuteronomy** emphasizes the importance of Sabbath observance, strictly forbidding any kind of servile work, and man imitating God by resting from labor and using the time provided for giving thanks to God for the six-day work of creation. There was the further acknowledgement of God's rescue of the Jewish people enslaved in Egypt where for centuries they had been forced to do the most menial work in the land. The Sabbath, therefore, became a perpetual reminder of what God had delivered the Jewish people from, providing them with an opportunity to pause and express their gratitude. Christians use the bondage experience of the Jews as a metaphor for the deliverance of the human race from the effects of sin, spiritual death and separation from God, through the redemptive life and death of his incarnate Son, Jesus Christ. This is what Sunday signifies for the Christian.

**Saint Mark** in his gospel describes the abuse in the understanding of the Sabbath by the official interpreters of the Law, the Scribes and the Pharisees, whose narrow views brought them into conflict with Jesus. They objected to Jesus curing on the Sabbath as a violation, just as they upbraided the apostles for breaking the Sabbath by plucking wheat in the fields to allay their hunger. Their narrow-minded concept of the Sabbath observance led to unnecessary hardship for the sick, the needy and the hungry, causing Jesus to point out that the *Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath*. Another time when they took Jesus to task for curing a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath, he effectively overrode their objections by posing them an unanswerable question: *Is it permitted to do a good deed on the Sabbath or an evil one; to preserve life or destroy it?* He responds to the questions by performing the cure, refuting them in this way, but enraging them to the point of their actively plotting his destruction.

What we may well ask ourselves, is our own attitude to the proper observance of Sunday, which has increasingly become like every other day of the week, as we behold the goods of the material world replacing the God responsible for the world and all it contains. The time accorded to God has been reduced to what can be fitted into what we regard as more important needs, as our lives become absorbed by the relative trivia and minute details of ordinary day-to-day

concerns. Our coming to church should not arise from a sense of duty or obligation alone; it should stem from a recognition that we owe to a providential God our homage and gratitude for providing for our needs and sustaining our existence in addition to the gift of his Son to secure our salvation. Nothing should stand in the way of allotting, at the very least, a tiny portion of one day in a week to what the Church provides as service to God by uniting ourselves to Him and to each other, thereby fulfilling the twofold commandment which includes all the rest, and in this way **demonstrating our love of God and our love of neighbor.**

### **The Fourth Centenary of Shakespeare's Death: 1564 – 2016**

Throughout the world celebrations in honor of the life and achievement of William Shakespeare will take place during 2016. In a January edition of *L'Osservatore Romano* a two page spread called attention to a 1964 audience, given by Pope Paul VI to observe the birth of the bard, to the Royal Shakespeare Company which had just given a recital of selections from Shakespeare's works in honor of his birth on April 23, 1564, coincidentally the feast of **Saint George**, patron saint of England. In his remarks the Pope praised the playwright for "lofty genius and powerful language which induce men to listen with reverence to the great verities he expounds, of death, judgement, of hell and heaven." He then blessed a 1623 copy of the **First Folio** of the Plays which the group had brought with them and which he mistook for a gift to the Vatican Library. The mistake was soon rectified and the Folio returned to where it remains, in Stratford-on-Avon, birthplace of the poet. This year, 2016, to mark the fourth centenary of the death of the poet, a special performance of his most widely known play, **The Tragedy of Hamlet**, will be given in the Vatican by the Royal Shakespeare Company, and tour many countries throughout the world. Praise for Shakespeare's unique contribution to world literature was also expressed in an article for the journal by **David Cameron, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom**, in which he emphasized that "in Shakespeare we have one man, whose vast imagination, boundless creativity and instinct for humanity encompasses the whole of human experience. He lives today in our language, our culture and society and through his enduring influence on education, he played a critical role in shaping modern English and helping to make it the world's language."

In November 2014 an extraordinary discovery was made in a public library of **St. Omer** in Northern France; the identification of an original copy of the First Folio of 1623, a rare and priceless find. Originally it came to France by a recusant

Catholic, forced to escape from the harsh persecution of the Protestant Queen Elizabeth in order to study at the Jesuit College of Saint Omer. Here the plays of Shakespeare were used as a text for the many Catholic allusions, themes and viewpoints that made it suitable for study and what Pope Paul VI praised “for their salutary reminder to modern man that God exists, that there is a life after this life, that evildoing is punished and good rewarded.” (Lope **de Vega** (1562-1635), Spain’s greatest and most prolific dramatist, was a product of Jesuit education, profiting from the stress on drama as a pedagogical device.) Copies of individual plays by Shakespeare were also used for seminary students at Douai and in Spain in Jesuit colleges at this time. For scholars the startling discovery of the **St Omer First Folio** has reopened the controversial question of Shakespeare’s religious background, lending greater credence to his status as *a crypto-Catholic* rather than as merely *a sympathetic observer* of the sufferings of his persecuted compatriots.

## LITURGICAL CALENDAR FOR APRIL

- 3 SUNDAY II OF EASTER (Octave Day)**
- 4 The Annunciation of the Lord**
- 5 THE PASSING OF SAINT BENEDICT**
- 7 St. John Baptist de la Salle, Priest & Educator
- 10 SUNDAY III OF EASTER**
- 11 St. Stanislaus, Bishop and Martyr
- 17 SUNDAY IV OF EASTER**  
(World Day of Prayer for Vocations)
- 21 St. Anselm, Bishop & Doctor
- 23 St. George, Patron of England**  
**Date of Birth & Death of Shakespeare**
- 24 SUNDAY V OF EASTER**
- 25 St. Mark, Evangelist
- 29 St. Catherine of Siena, Virgin & Doctor



**Saint George**

## **Dom Wilfrid Bayne, Herald of Portsmouth**

**In 1935 Dom Wilfrid first became interested in heraldry, for which he developed a skill in painting coats of arms. One of his first projects was to decorate the main hall of Saint Benet's, an imposing Tudor Gothic building at Portsmouth, with armorial shields of ancient monasteries in England, replacing the coats of arms painted by his mentor, the leading herald in the United States, Pierre La Rose, who designed the arms of Father Hugh Diman's first school, Saint George's and later the arms of Portsmouth Priory. La Rose's handsome shields depicting the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge adorned the school dining hall for many years and have now been returned to Saint Benet's. During the course of his life Dom Wilfrid received many heraldic commissions, including arms for bishops, abbots, and monasteries throughout the United States and abroad. For Bishop Ansgar, a fellow monk of Portsmouth who became Catholic Bishop of Sweden, he created his coat of arms which is now inscribed on his tombstone in the monastery cemetery. Especially noteworthy were his designs for the four shields gracing the Pell Bridge in Newport. These stem from the arms of the Corte Real of Portugal and the navigator who discovered Narragansett Bay, Giovanni de Verezano of Florence, and then was pioneer of New York harbor. For his contributions to heraldry, Dom Wilfrid in his last years was admitted into the Order of St. Lazarus as *chaplain of justice*.**