

must come first, not material things. If we put our work ahead of everything else and put prayer in second place, this means that for us work is more important than prayer. It is pride and irreverence that lie behind this attitude. The work of the spiritually bankrupt cannot be sanctified. If we put spiritual matters first, God will take care of us. When we monks don't observe feast days, what are lay people supposed to do? If we don't do our spiritual work and plead with the Saints to help us, who will? What happens is that we end up saying all the time that we believe in God, but in reality we don't even trust in Him. If we monks and nuns, who wear the monastic cassock, will not respect the Canons of the Church, and violate and dishonour Her age-old traditions, what possible meaning can our lives have?

Normally, we must cease all work before the Vespers of Sunday or of a feast day. If arrangements can be made, it is better to work more on the previous day, and avoid any work after the Vespers of a festal celebration. It is a different matter, if, in the event of an emergency, some light tasks need to be taken care of in the afternoon of a Sunday or a feast day. But even in such cases, the work should be done with discretion. In the old days, when farmers out in the fields heard the church bell announcing Vespers, they would do the sign of the cross and cease all work. The women of the neighbourhood would do the same. They would stand up, cross themselves and stop knitting or anything else they were doing. And God would bless them. They had their health and enjoyed life... Now they have abolished the feast days, distanced themselves from God and the Church, and not surprisingly, end up spending all the money they earn on doctors and hospitals.

Once, a man came to my monastic cell and said, "My boy gets sick very often and doctors cannot figure out what's wrong with him." "Stop working on Sundays and things will change," I told him. He followed my advice, and his little boy recovered.

I always tell people that if they want to avoid calamities in their life, they should stop working on Sundays and feast days. Work schedules could be arranged to keep these days free. Where there is spiritual sensitivity, everything is possible; solutions will be found. That's really the issue here. Even if a particular solution is to our disadvantage and we suffer a loss, in the end we'll be twice blessed. But so many people fail to understand this. They do not even attend the Divine Liturgy. The Divine Liturgy sanctifies. If a Christian will not go to Church on Sunday, how will he be sanctified?

It's unfortunate, but, the way things are going, people will do away with feast days, and with everything else. ... They have come up with new feasts, Mother's Day, May Day, April Fools' Day... Pretty soon they'll say, "Today is Artichoke Day, tomorrow Cypress Day, later the birthday of the inventor of the atom bomb, or of soccer and so on..." But God will not abandon us...

Taken from the book Elder Paisios of Mount Athos - Spiritual Counsels I: With Pain and Love for Contemporary Man.

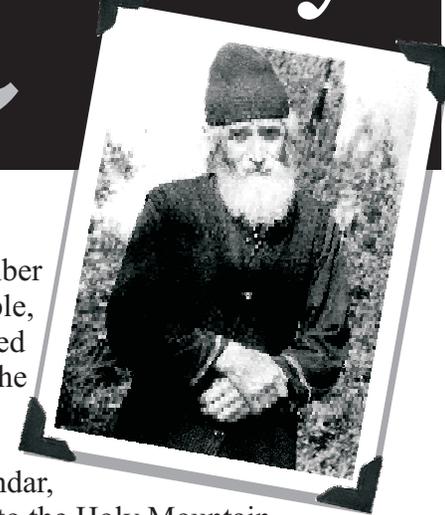
Elder Paisios of Mount Athos

On Feasts & Sundays

I remember how lay people, who celebrated the Feast of the Holy Cross according to the new calendar,

would come to the Holy Mountain after the feast and bring us grapes. Sometimes the day they arrived, we would be celebrating the Feast of the Holy Cross according to the Old Calendar. But the Fathers would never go to unload the boat on such a day. They would send them back, or just leave them there, both the caique and the grapes. They would do the same if an olive oil or wood shipment would happen to arrive on the day of a feast. And the Monasteries were poor. The monks were thinking

"What will people say if they see monks working on this day?" They would rather have a storm take the load, and lose the oil and the grapes, than to go and unload the



ship, miss the Feast and scandalize souls.

Not so today. I happened to be at a monastery on the eve of a feast day, and the monks were unloading grapes. The entire brotherhood later gathered together to squeeze them. That night they were supposed to have a Vigil, but they decided to postpone it and transfer it to another time.

And that was a major Feast! "In the case of need even a law may be transferred..." In another place, they were repairing a Monastery damaged by fire, on a Sunday. Just wait ... it will burn down again! When people who live in the world see these things, they naturally say to

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themselves, "Feast days mean nothing anymore." We monks should be especially careful not to work on feast days, not only because doing so is a sin, but because we also become a cause for scandal we sin twice. People who live in the world are looking for an excuse to justify their sins. They may be working day and night and never observing the feasts, but let them see a monk or nun working on some emergency and the devil will whisper to them, "Take a look; if priests work, why not you?" A nun may be seen simply airing a blanket on a Sunday, and if people see her, they will think, "Well, if nuns are working, what's wrong with us going to work?" That's why we need to be very careful; we don't want to cause a scandal.

- Elder, what if a workman wants to work on a feast day, let's say on the Entrance of the Mother of God into the Temple?

- To work in the Monastery on the Feast day of the Entrance of the Mother of God into the Temple? No, that's not right! He should not be allowed to work.

- Elder, this actually did happen. One of the Sisters did not think of telling the workman to come another day.

- Then the Sister needs to be given a canon (i.e. a penance by which to repent).

- Elder, on a feast day, after the Vigil is over, if one becomes sleepy, can they do some handiwork while saying the Jesus Prayer?

- Can't she do prostrations? Let her do prostrations to overcome her sleepiness. Why do handiwork?

- How about on Sunday? Is it right to weave a prayer rope after a Sister has performed her spiritual duties?

Why should you weave a prayer rope? Why not enjoy this day's full spiritual nourishment? Unfortunately the spirit of the world is entering our monasteries... Of course it's different with the monk or nun who serves the visitors, or the cooks who serve in the kitchen. Someone needs to be there to do the necessary work...

Do you remember Father Menas in the Skete of Saint Anna? A fisherman brought him fish on a Sunday morning, for the feast day. "They're fresh, Elder," he said. "Today is Sunday. When did you catch them, they're so fresh?" he replied, puzzled. "This morning," the man answered. "Throw them away son, they're anathematized," Father Menas responded "And if you want to

make sure that I'm telling you the truth, give one to the cat and see if it will eat it." And indeed, the fisherman threw the cat a fish but the animal turned its head away, with repulsion. That's how sensitive monks were in those days!

Now, on great feast days, you'll see monasteries full of workers and technicians. Once, on the Feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God in August, a monastery had a whole crew working with chain saws in the forest, gathering wood. Even though it was a clear day, suddenly it got cloudy, and lightning struck just next to the woodcutters who were so terrified that they left without even notifying anyone that the forest was on fire! It took them forever to put out the fire. The following Sunday two woodcutting crews went out again. These fires are God's wrath, because we have turned Sundays and feast days into working days. And the sad thing is that we don't realize what we are doing....

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When we don't get stuck on unimportant details, which would cause no harm if omitted, we will benefit twice as much from whatever good we do, and give to the Saints, whose feasts we celebrated, double the praise they are due. We should try to the best of our ability, not to devote ourselves to work at the expense of our spiritual life, which should always come first; this way, no matter what job we do, we'll have the blessing of God. It's our spiritual life that