

If you shop on Sunday, you are part of the problem

Matt Walsh's recent blog on the Thanksgiving/Black Friday controversy titled If You Shop on Thanksgiving, You Are Part of the Problem surprisingly takes aim at the American consumer. Typically, outrage concerning the increasing hours of Thanksgiving shopping is directed at major retailers, but Walsh points out that retailers need customers. If people did not shop on Thanksgiving, then the stores would not be open for the holiday.

It is easy to complain about the changing tradition of Thanksgiving. Last year, I warned that the traditional Thanksgiving family dinner could go the way of the Dodo bird, into extinction. I wrote about the sad transition:

At one point, our country valued giving God thanks, and for one day a year, we collectively expressed our gratitude to God for our food, homes, family, and country. The former importance of Thanksgiving is a testament to the Christian heritage of his country, but sentiments have changed, greatly diminishing the significance of the holiday. In its place, Black Friday has arisen.

Black Friday represents America's obsession with stuff. In a few days, millions of Americans will wait hours in line, trample those who get in their way, and then fight to grab the latest must-have item, all in the name of a bargain. More than another event, Black Friday demonstrates the materialism and greed that has infiltrated our culture.

As I have continued to reflect on the sad state of Thanksgiving, I have begun to realize that the hostile takeover of Thanksgiving by Black Friday is not the main the problem. More troubling is that the cultural struggle is to keep two, ONLY TWO, days for God and family: Thanksgiving and Christmas.



Thanksgiving is one of the few days of the year reserved for family

Nearly everyone concedes there are 363 days a year for shopping. The only difference is that “social conservatives” are arguing for only 363 days of shopping, and the retailers are pushing for 365 days. That’s not a big difference.

Christmas already has become so absorbed by consumerism that it’s hard to find a young child that values the birth of Jesus over presents and Santa, and sadly, we’re witnessing the decline of Thanksgiving before our very own eyes the past few years.

Somehow, you are considered a countercultural radical if suggest two days, let me repeat TWO DAYS, with no shopping. That’s not the Catholic perspective. Rather, a clear priority exists in our faith: God, family, and then somewhere toward the bottom, shopping.

We need to abate our obsession with shopping, and find time to rest every week. It’s pretty clear in the Bible: “Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God.” And in the Catholic Catechism, “On Sundays and other holy days of obligation the faithful are bound . . . to abstain from those labors and business concerns which impede the worship to be rendered to God, the joy which is proper to the Lord’s Day, or the proper relaxation of mind and body.”

We shouldn’t embrace Sunday as a day of rest just because is a commandment and emphasized in the Catechism. It is also a wonderful and enjoyable practice. Growing up, I loved Sundays. We would get up leisurely, go to Mass, have a family brunch, and then play games as a family. There was no shopping, no activities, not even homework until the evening. It was a day for worshipping God and leisure time with the family. I cherished it.

If you are too busy Monday through Saturday that you must shop on Sunday, then you are too busy. Look at your schedule, and take something out. The 34 hours of television the average American watches per week, might be a good place to start, but do not skimp on God and family time.

Moreover, think of all the retail workers who are required to work on Sunday. They cannot go to church, they cannot rest, and they cannot spend time with their

families.

Some might counter that it's an economic necessity for stores and restaurants to be open on Sunday. I would respond that Chick-fil-A seems to be expanding even though they are closed on Sunday. Likewise, Paramus, New Jersey is one of the largest retail centers in the world, doing \$5 billion in retail sales per year, but none of it on Sunday because of the town's strict blue laws.

It would be wonderful to have one day per week where there is no traffic, no shopping stress, no running around. Even if a person is not religious or even Christian, they would agree that some down time with those that matter the most is a good thing.

Matt Walsh points out in his blog that there is a level of hypocrisy in individuals who complain about stores being open on Thanksgiving and then go shopping on Thanksgiving. I find it equally odd that proponents of family time and defenders of traditional Thanksgiving and Christmas practices fail to mention the collapse of Sunday as a day of rest.

I see the root cause of the increased amount of shopping on Thanksgiving not due to greedy retailers or even shoppers hungry for a good deal. Rather, it is due to the blurring of sacred time and profane time, or more specially, the decline of sacred time. Sacred time is special time set aside for God, when worldly activities are suspended. Once the idea of sacred time, with Sunday at its center, decreased in importance, it was only a matter of time before all holidays, Thanksgiving and Christmas included, were overrun by consumerism.

Are you upset with the collapse of Thanksgiving? Then, do something. Matt Walsh suggests we set out by not shopping on Thanksgiving. It's a start, but we need to go farther than building a cultural defensive wall around Thanksgiving and Christmas. I suggest we begin by re-sanctifying time, holding holy each and every Sunday.