

Living the Spirit-Retreat Look Around You

Summer offers many of us an opportunity to get away for a time from our everyday activities. We may call it a vacation, a word that means we make a kind of emptiness in our schedules. It refers to freedom, freedom from occupations that are the normal part of life. Others call it a holiday. I suppose that word can conjure up a religious meaning, a time free of work, much like a religious Sabbath or feastday. Those who travel in Britain will find that such a time is usually called a holiday.

Often in spiritual retreats we have heard that in some matters there can be no holiday, no setting aside of our religious obligations. In former days it was wonderful to see how many Catholics made a great effort never to miss Mass even when at such places as the Jersey seashore communities. Heaven forbid that one would not be able to find a church on Sunday. We knew that we needed special protection to survive the risks every vacation multiplied.

Most spiritual authors recognize that all of us need to step aside from duty and obligation from time to time. We need it because we are not machines. Our physical and psychological well being requires recreation. If we take that word apart, we see how we create ourselves anew. Of course, there is a part of us that can never really be changed. That is the work of the Creator that we acknowledge as the giver of the gift of life to us.

Recreation has taken many forms today that were unknown previously. For some there is a greater openness to physical activities. For others there is there quiet time for reading enjoyable (and I hope morally good) books. Whatever you or I may choose it is important to use this time for spiritual growth. Children, for example, may well learn many lessons that will foster this process. Just how to get along with others in their activities is a lesson well learned. How to let others sometimes win the game!

Being American to the core, many of us have embraced almost by osmosis the work ethic that is so noteworthy among us. This has been called the Protestant work ethic, for reasons that I simply do not know, nor care to know. It means that we are valued for the work we do, not a bad idea at all. But if that is the sole and only value we see in ourselves, we have a limited understanding of Christian spirituality.

In the past those who propagated anti-Catholic caricatures often presented Catholics as lazy, fun-loving members of society. They were accused of being too attached to “Rum, Romanism and ... rebellion (?)” It is worth reviewing our history to see how this played into the effort to keep the working man (often poor Catholic immigrants) from forming unions or demanding better working conditions. Only hard work in the political arena, supported by the forceful efforts of the Catholic hierarchy among others, made possible the benefits many workers have today, including the right to a time of vacation – with pay!

Like everything else, we have to balance work with fun or leisure. We also must see in all we do small advances in becoming what the Lord has in mind for each of us. What He has in mind is something that can be described by today’s code word – awesome. In fact the Scriptures make this clear. *The eye has not seen, the ear has not heard what things God has prepared for those who love Him.* From this we learn a lesson that cannot be ignored in living the spirit. It is that our real work is love. It is also our destiny.

Maybe that is why Pope Benedict, looking out as he must at a world with so many difficulties, still chose to make his first encyclical teaching about love. *Deus Caritas Est* is the name of this formal teaching. It may seem at time an otherworldly missive to give to the Catholic world and the world in general. However, it is a necessary part of a human life that accepts that we have become otherworldly. We have been raised to a supernatural destiny. Our path is marked out for us with many milestones that seem quite ordinary.

Is your work ordinary? Think about it. It may be the means for achieving many spiritual graces for yourself and others. Is your rest from work ordinary? Think about it and find there yet another ingredient. I hope you do. I can tell you what that should be. I, like you, must search for it constantly. It is love.

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These inserts have been made possible by the goodness of our pastor to allow them to be a part of our bulletins. My first desire in writing them has been and still is the desire to bring to you a less formal kind of preaching on my part. In these days when the number of priests has diminished, it is likely that Catholics never experience their priests as a normal part of their life. When did a priest last visit your home as priest?

In my childhood and youth we had such a visit every year. The priest made the rounds for the block collection. He did not hesitate to ask how things were going spiritually in the household. How else could he answer the spiritual report a parish gave to the bishop every January? In that visit it was possible to see the priest as priest, but also as himself. One who never smiled in church often was quite jolly on such a visit!

I would never want to impose the idea that such annual visits be made a part of the modern priest's ministry. For one thing, it has never been totally clear to me why priests should have to beg us to support the church by personal appeals. Today our pastors and parish priests are overburdened in many cases. Like many other ways of life I would single out the many meetings that our structured life demands!

In these inserts I want to be a constant reminder that priests and people alike, are called to live the Spirit. It is a part of our vocation as children of a very loving Father, a friendly Savior and a comforting Paraclete or Advocate. We are all in this adventure together. It is not a bad idea to get to know one another as best we can.

To update you on my own state of being these days will fit this description. At present I am in a kind of five-week program around the matter of congestive heart failure. It is a challenge to allow myself to be educated again and again about so many matters that impinge upon my health and welfare.

On Sunday I spoke about the need to not look back on our Christian commitment. This applies, I think, to me these days. I need much help of prayers to meet the challenge that may well mean some changes in my comfortable way of living. I know that you will keep me in your prayers. Perhaps some few may be called upon to do even more. We shall see.

Most of you know how I like to travel to London. A month or so ago I was getting up the courage to go again, despite my concerns of traveling alone. With all the troubles there, I can only say that I never got past the dreaming stage. I have often been in just the area of the first bomb – but never at 2 A.M.! Isn't God good?

God love you always!

Monsignor Morrison