

Fr. Tom's Celestial Musings

The Year of the Priesthood

Part 3: Priestly Rest¹

Last night, I spent a few hours visiting with a friend of mine from seminary. He had come back to Fort Smith to spend some time with his family and we were able to visit before he headed back to his religious community in Nebraska. We began our conversation on the topic of ministry. However, we soon began talking about the importance of relaxation and rest.

Last month, I wrote about the victimhood and sacrificial nature of the priesthood. While victimhood and sacrifice are essential to the identity of priests, relaxation is, too. Unfortunately, most priests do not know how to relax. Not only are we not taught how to relax in seminary, but our culture teaches us to be workaholics and busybodies. This is so pervasive that even when most of us *think* we're relaxing, we're really just engaged in a different form of busyness.

What does rest look like in the priesthood? I can't speak for every priest, but personally, I have found that taking my day off each week blesses me in several important ways. First, it gives me time for additional prayer. After I finish breakfast and reading the newspaper, I slip into the chapel for prayer, knowing that I don't have to set an alarm or watch the clock since I don't have to be anywhere. There is something noticeably different about my prayer on Monday mornings as compared to the other six days. By way of an analogy, I might explain the difference as being similar to friends having a chance to visit for an hour during their lunch break as compared to visiting on a Friday evening when neither of them has to be anywhere for a couple of days.

In addition to prayer, another important aspect of priestly re-creation is exercise. Monday mornings are the most convenient time for me to exercise. I try to ride my bicycle before it gets too hot and humid. I always feel better after I exercise! Before I ride I read the Scripture readings for the upcoming Sunday with the intention of pondering them while I ride, but I always end up being distracted by the mundane things going on around me, such as traffic. I've come to assume that the distractions are God's way of reminding me not to take work on my bicycle rides!

Spiritual reading is also an extremely important part of priestly rest. Often on my day off, I take a spiritual book with me to a restaurant and enjoy a *long* meal while I read. This is a blessing in two particular ways. Since throughout the rest of the week I eat a lot of meals in a hurried fashion (i.e. while driving in the car or working at my desk), a sit-down meal with an actual fork, spoon, and knife, is a tremendous treat. It is so relaxing to slowly eat, nourishing my body while a good book nourishes my soul.

Rest is also about relationship. If you haven't noticed already, the busyness of our world is extremely *non-relational*. Most of the things that have been created to save us time and allow us to get more work done are the very things that pull us out of interaction with others. For example, e-mail, texting, webinars, self-checkout lanes at the store, the pay-at-the-pump option at gas stations, and the list could go on and on. I've come to understand that authentic priestly rest is something that invites me into relationship with other people. This might include the people I visit with at the radio controlled airport or the time I spend on the phone with family members. Regardless of what form it takes, Mondays are days when I connect with people I haven't talked to in a while.

When most people think about the priesthood, they think about what a priest *does*—Sacraments, counseling, teaching, administration, etc. While these are important parts of a priest's life, they quickly lose their meaning without authentic rest—a recreation that is not simply a different activity, but a re-creation.

¹ In honor of the "Year of the Priesthood," announced by Pope Benedict, this is a twelve part series on the priesthood