

Returning Home To Rest

Ed Zablocki, SFO

National Work Commission

When I saw this issue's Jubilee theme of "returning home" the phrase that immediately came to mind was "returning home....from work." The image of the laborer coming home after putting in a long day was etched in my mind. Returning home from work to do what? Well, returning home to rest.

After writing about work-related themes for six years this is the perfect time, as it is my final article on behalf of the Work Commission, to develop work's counterpoint - rest. Rest is as much a part of God's plan for us as is work. We see this clearly in Genesis. "On the seventh day God finished his work which he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done." (*Gen. 2:2*). We, who are made in God's image and likeness are called to imitate the Creator's pattern of activity and quiescence. Work and rest, when taken together and held in dynamic balance, constitute the natural rhythm of our lives. Our SFO Constitution captures this reality in recommending that "Secular Franciscans should maintain a balance between work and rest and should strive to make meaningful use of their leisure time." (GC 21.2)

As I have tried in the past to uncover the meaning of work for my brothers and sisters in Francis, so I would now like to attempt to do the same for "rest" in the limited space available. To do so we will turn to an Apostolic Letter presented to the Church by Pope John Paul II on the Feast of Pentecost in 1998. The letter is entitled *Dies Domini* - "The Lord's Day."

The Holy Father makes immediately clear that God's rest as depicted in Genesis is not to be treated lightly - as a day of simply doing nothing after six days of ceaseless activity.

"It would be banal to interpret God's "rest" as a kind of divine 'inactivity'.... The divine rest of the seventh day does not allude to an inactive God, but emphasized the fullness of what has been accomplished. It speaks, as it were, of God's lingering before the 'very good' work (*Gen. 1:31*) which his hand has wrought, in order to cast upon it *a gaze full of joyous delight*. This is a 'contemplative' gaze which does not look to new accomplishments but enjoys the beauty of what has already been achieved." (No. 11)

John Paul II suggests that our time of rest, particularly each Sunday, follow the Creator's example. Our time of rest is time for us to recall all that God has done for us. We recall not only the blessing's that have touched our own lives but the most fundamental gifts of all - our own lives and the magnificent creation of which they are a part. Sunday is a time to re-adjust our vision of reality - a vision that our week of self-reliance on the job may have blurred - to come to see correctly that all good comes from God and that we are totally dependent on the One who brought us into being out of love. "The Lord's Day...recalls that *the universe and history belong to God*, and without a constant awareness of that truth, man cannot serve in the world as co-worker of the Creator." (No. 15)

The Holy Father also references another Old Testament text from Exodus: "Remember the Sabbath day in order to keep it holy." (*Ex, 20:8*) Commenting on this text, John Paul II emphasizes that remembering the Sabbath "... is a call to awaken remembrance of the grand and fundamental work of God which is creation, a remembrance which must inspire the entire religious life of man and then fill the day on which man is called to *rest*. Rest therefore acquires a sacred value: the faithful are called to rest not only *as* God rested, but to rest *in* the Lord, bringing the entire creation to him, in praise and thanksgiving, intimate as a child and friendly as a spouse." (No. 16)

Dialogue Starter

How do you "rest?" That is, how do you spend your Sundays and other free time?