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What would Jesus do ... for himself?

by Kate Childs Graham

As we sweat through the dog days of summer, all I want to do is sit on the porch, drink lemonade and play guitar. Typically, however, I have found it hard to relax. In the complex and unjust world we live in, it always seems like there is so much, too much, to do. In the end, there never seems like a lot of time to rest or take care of myself.

Our Catholic faith is very centered around doing, in particular doing for others. This is one of the things that I love the most about our church -- this attention to the needs of others. However, somewhere in there, I think we may lose sight of what we need to do for ourselves to be healthy, happy and whole.

Which brings me to the question: What would Jesus do for Himself?

Looking through the Gospels, there seem to be three key themes related to Jesus' self-maintenance.

1. Jesus spent time with friends.

So many stories in the Gospels show Jesus eating, drinking and enjoying the company of friends. Jesus even made friends with people who some would consider unworthy, such as the tax collectors mentioned in the Gospel of Mark.

I have found that, after leaving the school setting where friendships were a given and moving to a big city, that it can be hard to put myself out there to make new friends or nurture new friendships. It seems easier sometimes just to go home and play it safe.

While we all have different ideas of what it means to be a friend and different thresholds for the amount of friends we need, friendship is so important to leading happy and healthy lives. True friendship brings out the best in us, lets us relax and enjoy the gifts we have.

2. Jesus took time alone.

The Gospel of Luke reads, "The reputation of Jesus continued to grow. Large crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to some place where he could be alone and pray."

Years ago, I never wanted to be alone. I always want to be surrounded by those I love and felt, on some level, that by taking alone time I would either be missing out or disappointing others.

It is crucial to carve out alone time to reflect, read, pray and so on. When we make that time, we are more able to cope with life's joys and challenges.

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3. Jesus cared for his body.

The Gospel of Mark tells the story of a woman who anointed Jesus with perfumed oil in Bethany. Some of the apostles questioned this extravagance. But Jesus replied, "Let her alone. Why do you criticize her? She has done me a kindness."

I have to admit, up until my adult life, I had great disdain for spending too much time focused on caring for one's body. Much like the apostles, I thought this was an extravagance. At the same time, I was very disconnected from my body. I didn't pay attention to aches in my back or how certain shoes affected my posture. Getting a massage never crossed my mind.

Not to be too cliché, but our bodies are our temples and caring for them is anything but an extravagance. When we take care of our bodies, not only will we be better able to serve others, we will also be more in touch with our bodies themselves. It's a win-win, really.

Jesus knew that in taking care of Himself, He would be better able to care for others. So, as we round out the summer and sail into fall, I am going to try to emulate Jesus and take care of myself. Perhaps I will leave out the anointing, though, and opt for a mani/pedi instead.

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