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# This summer, make time for holy leisure

Isabella R. Moyer | Jul. 19, 2012 NCR Today

Winters are long and cold on the Canadian prairies. Leaves begin falling off the trees in September and don't return until late May. July and August are our sacred months of summer. We have a small window of opportunity for fun in the sun with family and friends, so we grab and relish each moment. Summer is also a time to remind ourselves of the physical, mental, spiritual and relational benefits of leisure time. I wrote the following blog post [1] back in February 2011. I must have been having visions of summer on a cold winter day.

A Trappist monk once gave a presentation on the need for balance in our life. The classic phrase from the Rule of Benedict is *ora et labora*, prayer and work. The monk challenged us all to add one more vital activity to the balance: leisure. At the time, I was spending a year in a Benedictine monastery discerning religious life. I was already grumbling that my days were filled with *ora et labora ... et labora ... et labora ...* and more-a *labora*. Here was this Trappist brother encouraging us all to make time for leisure. God bless him!

Many years later, I read a short reflection by Pope John Paul II on the importance of "holy leisure." It was given as he departed for his summer residence at Castel Gandolfo. Was he trying to justify his own vacation? I took it as a papal blessing for the much needed downtime in our lives. I didn't always agree with JPII, but this was one time I was willing to be obedient to the Holy Father.

Friends around the world have shown me how diverse we are in embracing leisure. Many North Americans admit they are workaholics and take few holidays, especially if they are self-employed. A friend in Paris who grew up in the United States speaks of the cultural adjustment she had to make to the lengthy and frequent vacations taken in France, though it wasn't a hard struggle. Having experienced the holiday mentality from both sides of the pond, she thinks we can learn a lot from our French friends.

When I attend an international gathering, the different approaches to work and leisure are apparent. We North Americans tend to be more focused on agendas, goals, documents and accomplishments. We're there to work, and will do so into the wee hours if we need to. Friends from Latin America, Europe and Africa know when the workday should end and the evening festivities should begin. Lively singing, dancing and story-telling emphasizes the importance of balancing work with fun. And it's usually in the fun times that relationships and friendships are formed and cemented.

Maybe it's this relational aspect of leisure that makes it truly holy. Work and doing is good. But we also need time to just be. It is in being that relationships are built, nurtured and strengthened -- our relationship with ourselves, with others and with God.

So get together with family and friends and head out into the sunshine. Set up the lawn chairs. Crack open a cold one, and raise a toast to holy leisure. Cheers!

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[1] http://catholicdialogue.com/2011/02/12/day-43-holy-leisure/