

PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

Summer's Unique Gift

While I love all the seasons of the year for their special gifts and challenges, I personally opt for Summer and the grace it offers me to be recreated and renewed.

I have always considered it a great blessing to live in a zone of the world where the change of seasons is visible and tangible. I must admit, however, that during the bleakest days of our prolonged Winters, I have envied those who have been able to fly away to be close to the equatorial sun. But only for a moment. I have lived in areas of the world where the rhythm of nature was not so clearly separated into our four segments of Winter's death, Spring's rebirth, Summer's maturing growth, and Autumn's reminder of the inevitable cycle of life as a prelude to death. Yet, I opt for Summer. I respect the bumper stickers that encourage us to 'Pray Snow' and to 'Think Green' and to applaud 'Autumn Leaves' but I still opt for Summer.

I love Summer because it offers me days to be recreated and renewed. The busy day-to-day schedules which occupy most moments during three of the seasons make Summer a welcome guest — a special grace to breathe more easily and to recapture the strength needed to meet the demands of the rest of the year. Yet, much of what has been written in recent years about a theology of leisure reminds me that free time can be barren and boring or productive. This does not depend on the season of the year nor on the location chosen for recreation, but on the condition of our own spirit which alone has power to make free time fruitful.

Joseph Peifer is one author who has reflected on leisure. He makes a clear distinction between leisure as a mood and leisure as free time. "Leisure," he writes, "is a mental and spiritual attitude. It is not simply the result of external

factors. It is not the inevitable result of spare time. It is, in the first place, an attitude of mind, a condition of the soul."

Maxim Gorky has observed that the prevailing mood at many an oasis of leisure is ennui — boredom — where God fails to come on stage and so the meaninglessness of life becomes heightened. He saw the problem years ago at the seashore. Seeing the crowds at Coney Island, wading in the surf or in each other's salad, he concluded that it is a dull people that spends its leisure at Coney Island.

I know nothing about Coney Island. I have seen only photos of the densely crowded beach — humanity so packed together that the sands seem obscured by broiled flesh. It seems to offer little opportunity for the reflections that George Herbert describes: "He that will learn to pray, let him go to the sea. Nor does it represent the sea described by Ann Morrow Lindbergh in her reflections entitled, "Gifts from the Sea," a beautiful meditation on the power of the sea to lift her drained spirit and to renew her life.

Vance Packard remarked that "leisure has become a real problem for our younger generation for whom work has become standardized, schooling has become formalized and leisure mechanized by TV, movies, radio, records and cars. Leisure has been identified by this generation as escape, entertainment and indiscriminate excursions. Which all adds up to more time on our hands but less leisure. For leisure is not a matter of clock and calendar nor artificial living amid others' exploitations — but creative living among one's own enthusiasms." I believe it has become a real problem for all generations.

In this "The Theory of the Leisure Class," Thorstein Veblen offered the opinion that leisure shapes the world. I am sure that it is at least indicative of our personal values which determine the power of leisure time to renew our sagging spirits.

A few years ago, Father Albert P. Bartlett, SJ, then rector of our own McQuaid Jesuit High School, expressed his concern about the way we use our leisure time in a letter to parents of the student body. His thesis, simply stated, was that, with the expanded opportunities for leisure which society provides us today, we as educators should prepare our students to use it as a blessing.

"We should believe that one essential function of education is to equip for and ensure an elevated use of leisure. Without such orientation, leisure can lead to listlessness and boredom, which for many, undermine the educational process, and for some in life, prompt them to look about for the exit sign."

Father Bartlett believed that a quality education could elevate leisure to the status of personal blessing by stirring a personal enthusiasm for the values to be found in the quiet moments of life. It has always saddened me to see the same hectic pace that accompanies our days of labor as the companion of our moments of leisure.

How can quality education accomplish this? Father Bartlett believed that a good education could stir the enthusiasm that could make leisure time the blessing it was intended to be, by enabling us to discover ourselves in the serenity and solitude of moments removed from the sheltered and splintered busyness of daily demands; in moments that allow us to dream dreams, to realize the uniqueness of our own personalities, the possibilities of doing something incredibly our own.

I pray that this Summer will offer these blessings to all of you. The Psalmist said it all so well: "Have leisure and know that I am God." (ps. 65:11)

The Lord's Prayer... a Special Reflection

Pope Paul VI delivered the following address to the General Audience of June 23:

We will invite your spiritual availability, which we think is open and eager for a word of ours at this moment, to reflect once more on prayer. It seems to us that the synthesis of spiritual life for which the recent liturgical festivities have prepared us, practically consists in this action.

The renewal of our moral life, that is that conversion, that uprightness that directs every operation of ours, that "metanoia" of which the Gospel speaks and to which reference is often made then, the trusting and loving relationship re-established with God by means of access to the paschal sacraments, and moreover a conscious and dangerous experience of the historic-social moment in which we find ourselves; put a filial and spontaneous prayer in our heart and on our lips. Perhaps we are in the propitious condition to send it flying towards the mystery of God, a mystery that is no longer blind, no longer frightening, but confirmed by faith and documented by some joyful, interior experience.

And then, what prayer will ours be? Let us ask the divine Master himself, the Lord Jesus: "Teach us to pray" (Lk 11, 3). Here is the first and supreme formula par excellence of our talk with God, such as Christ taught us: the "Our Father." It is the simplest, happiest and deepest expression of our religion. We all know it.

But we will do well to dedicate a special reflection to it, in order to become aware of nothing else of our fortune in being able to pray in this way. We will not venture to say any more

to you now. Let it be enough to ask you to reflect at least on the religious relationship that this prayer establishes between us little atoms in the ocean of the universe and the Creator of everything, the infinite, eternal, ineffable Being, omnipresent and mysterious, the God of heaven and earth, the relationship of sons with their own Father.

This first realization is enough to arrest our thought. Have we become so great as to be able to assume the title of sons of God? Or is it God who has deigned to stoop towards us to the extent of authorizing us to consider him, to know him, as our Father? This is the heart of the Gospel; this is the familiar and superlative perspective point in which Christian revelation places us. Let us think of it, let us think of it, because we are at once carried off, as it were, to the boundless horizon of the universe. Our Father (ours, let us remember), who art in heaven. The atmosphere of mystery restores to the Father his face, beyond every attempt of ours to contemplate it, but does not take away from us the certainty and the bliss of having taken possession of his true, sweet name. Our Father, the living and loving principle of our little, yes, but marvellous being, which, illuminated by the present and invisible light of the divine sun, reveals itself to our conscience as resembling him; the words of the beginning: "Let us make man after our likeness" (Gen 1, 26), and then in lumine tuo videbimus lumen (Ps 35, 10): in thy light shall we see light.

This first announcement of the dialogue, made possible between man and God, would be enough to make us thank Christ, and tell him the sudden and rapturous joy of our spirit: "Master, it is good for us to be here!" (Mk 9, 5).

But this is merely the entrance-hall to our conversation, which, beginning from the threshold of his entrance into the kingdom of heaven, became a heavenly conversation (cf.

Eph 3, 20). You know how it proceeds, with a double symmetrical and trinitarian pattern. It begins with three ascending elevations, to the name, the kingdom and the will of God, in praise of him. The next three implore him, for bread, forgiveness and the defense which our frail existence needs. Both of these strain towards the effort that is possible for the humble, yet indispensable, human causality, so that prayer will not be cowardly, fatalistic resignation to the overwhelming difficulties of the hostile, obscure world surrounding us, but on the contrary will be addressed to the overwhelming, yet compassionate divine causality, which filial prayer implores to help and solve needs that we cannot solve. Here is the point of contact and meeting with divine sovereign efficiency. To this, human efficiency opens and joins humbly, but willingly and readily. How many aspects of religious wisdom are summed up here for our teaching and our comfort! How humble and how great we are made by the prayer of "Our Father", which was taught to us by the supreme and sole Master, who is Christ (cf. Mt 23, 8)! What subjective and personal depths it sounds within us, and what community harmonies it demands and promotes!

We will say no more; but we would like this queen of prayers to become the favorite one for us; and to be the subject, once at least, of special, careful meditation. There exists a whole literature on this "oratio dominica", on this prayer that the Lord himself taught us.

The expression of our inadequacy, our weakness, our guilt, the Lord's prayer can become our strength, our confidence, our hope: "Ask, and it shall be given you", the Lord says. "What man is there among you who, if his son asks him for a loaf, will hand him a stone? Therefore, if you, evil as you are, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him?" (Mt 7, 9-11). So pray, pray always, with our Apostolic Blessing.