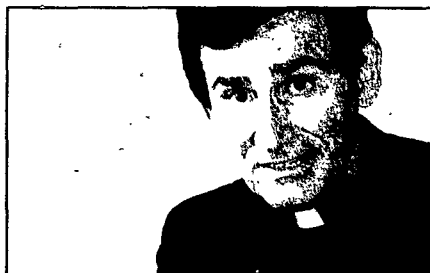


Is religious tradition being lost?

"Are people less religious today?" This question, posed by a TV interviewer, is on the minds of many people, especially worried parents who cherish the value of religion for their children.

It's a good question, but not the one to begin with. Rather, we need to ask: Are we losing our memory of how to be religious? Are we forgetting the essentials that cultivate religion? Is our tradition being lost?

Take, for example, the tradition of keeping holy the Sabbath. It wasn't too long ago that Sunday, for most people had deep religious significance. Everyone focused their morning on going to church and being involved in parish events. The afternoon often was devoted to visiting relatives.



Father Eugene Hemrick

The Human Side

There were unwritten dress codes that helped remind us to respect God's holy place. Visits to relatives reminded us that respect for our elders is important and created lasting memories of the value — the goodness — of family life.

There was also the reverential

custom of either tipping one's hat or making the sign of the cross when passing a church.

Among some immigrant cultures, there was the custom of making the sign of the cross and then crossing the thumb and forefinger into a cross and kissing it.

In so many homes, grace before and after meals was regularly recited.

On major feast days, families prepared special dishes, and everyone, without exception, was expected to be at the meal.

And our Catholic school system played a major role in keeping religion and its customs alive. It planted the seeds of religion in the minds and hearts of children and nurtured them throughout elementary and secondary education, and in our colleges and universities.

Today family life no longer has the luxury of a quiet, restful Sunday, nor do most families live close to grandparents who keep religious customs alive. Our sense of time and how best to use it has changed dramatically. We are much more restless, losing a sense of how to tru-

ly rest. The meaning of celebrating life is much different for our present generation. In many instances, we could use schooling in how to cultivate leisure.

With the loss of many of religion's support systems, our memories aren't being fed with the images and values that are essential to keeping it central to our lives. And, too, frequenting shopping malls and movie theaters, or becoming engrossed in sporting events, round-the-clock news and a quickened pace of life leave little space for anything sacred.

We can't turn back the clock in order to rectify this. What we can do is to understand that we are a new generation of Catholics facing post-modern tests to religion not encountered before. We are being challenged not only to preserve past religious customs and traditions, but to create new and unique ones that will enter into our memories and serve to remind us of the centrality of religion and faith.

Father Hemrick is a columnist for Catholic News Service.

MISSION NEWS

"We are prepared to die for our faith in Jesus."

That's how Tony Bharaltik, a student at Sacred Heart Seminary in India, describes his feelings and those of his classmates. Explains that seminary's rector: "Each of our 284 students realizes the hardships ahead but is willing to offer himself to the service of God and the Church." Even with the anti-conversion laws in some Indian states, "our students courageously proclaim the Gospel," the rector explains, "going to the local villages to teach the children about Jesus, help in the parishes and organize basic Christian communities."



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