

The spirituality of not hurrying

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"Nothing can be more useful to a man than a determination not to be hurried." Thoreau wrote that and it's not meant as something trivial.

We hurry too much, pure and simple. As Henri Nouwen describes it: "One of the most obvious characteristics of our daily lives is that we are busy. We experience our days as filled with things to do, people to meet, projects to finish, letters to write, calls to make, and appointments to keep. Our lives often seem like over-packed suitcases bursting at the seams. In fact, we are almost always aware of being behind schedule. There is a nagging sense that there are unfinished tasks, unfulfilled promises, unrealized proposals. There is always something else that we should have remembered, done, or said. There are always people we did not speak to, write to, or visit. Thus, although we are very busy, we also have a lingering feeling of never really fulfilling our obligation." We are always hurrying.

What's wrong with hurrying? It causes tension, high blood pressure, accidents and robs us of the simple capacity to be in the moment.

But spiritual writers take this further. They see hurry as an obstacle



Father Ron Rolheiser

In Exile

to spiritual growth. Donald Nicholl, for example, says: "Hurry is a form of violence exercised upon time," an attempt, as it were, to make God's time our own, our private property. What he and others suggest is that, in hurrying, we exercise a form of greed and gluttony. How so?

Too often we have a simplistic notion of greed and gluttony. We imagine greed, for example, as hoarding money and possessions, as being selfish, hardhearted, like Scrooge in the Dickens Christmas tale.

For most of us, greed takes a different, more subtle form. More than money, we hoard experience. We try to drink in the world, all of it. We would like to travel to every place, see everything, feel every sensation,

not miss out on anything. We hurry what we're doing so as to be available to do something else. We try to juggle too many things at the same time precisely because we want too many things. The possessions we really want are experience, knowledge, sensation, achievement, status.

Gluttony works essentially the same. For most of us, the urge to consume is not so much about food or drink, but about experience. Our propensity to overeat generally has little to do with food and infinitely more to do with other kinds of consumption. We are always in a hurry because we are forever restless to taste more of life.

It's this kind of hurry, subtly driven by greed and gluttony, that can be a form of violence exercised upon time and can constitute an obstacle to holiness.

But there are other kinds of hurry that come from simple circumstance and duty. Almost every one of us has too many things to do. Daily, we struggle to juggle the demands of relationships, family, work, school, church, child care, shopping, attention to health, concern for appearance, housework, preparing meals, rent and mortgage payments,

car payments, commuting to and from work, accidents, unforeseen interruptions, illnesses, and countless other things that eat up more time than is seemingly available.

There's a hurriedness that doesn't come from greed or gluttony and that can't be dismissed with the simplistic judgment: "That's what she gets for trying to have it all!" Sometimes we have to hurry just to make do, and simple circumstance and duty eat up every available minute. That's not necessarily an obstacle to holiness, but can be one of its paths.

Still, we have to be careful not to rationalize. God didn't make a mistake in creating time; God made enough of it, and when we can't find enough time and, as the Psalmist says, find ourselves getting up ever earlier and going to bed ever later because we have too much to do, we need to see this as a sign that we had better make some changes.

Oblate Father Ron Rolheiser is a theologian, teacher and award-winning author. He currently serves in Toronto and Rome as the general councilor for Canada for his religious order, the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

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