

Last weekend I was on vacation, and this weekend I hear that Jesus himself also saw the need to take time away! After his cousin John the Baptist had been killed, we hear that Jesus “withdrew in a boat to a deserted place by himself.” Now, this probably wasn’t the most cheerful time, but Jesus saw the need to get away for a while, and he took it.

Today I’m going to speak to you about the value in “wasting” time. A few years ago I was talking with an 8<sup>th</sup> grade class about “what’s the purpose of life?”. I asked them, is it just to study so you can get into the high school you want, and then work and study so you can go to the college you want and then work and study so you can get the job you want, and then work some more so you can own the car and house you want and on and on and on. That simply can’t be what life is about. Our work can’t be so that we can work more. And so I told the 8<sup>th</sup> graders that the purpose of life is to do things which aren’t directed toward any particular goal. In short, to waste time. The 8<sup>th</sup> graders naturally loved this and asked if they could tell their parents I said so, and I said sure, but I’m not talking about video games. It’s gotta be wasting time with people you love.

I recently read a book titled Leisure: The Basis of Culture, by Josef Pieper. He argues that our western concept of the weekend has more to do with taking a break to recharge ourselves so that we can be more productive when working. We’ve lost the true sense of sabbath rest. We spend too much time doing nothing for the sake of doing something, and not nearly enough time doing nothing for no purpose.

There are three sides to this. Have any of you heard the acronym JOY? J-O-Y? It stands for Jesus - Others - Self. When those three are in that order in our lives, we experience true joy. Jesus first, then care for others, and then self-care. And this is important: Self-care is a necessary part of that balance. That’s a large part of why I took a week’s vacation, was to recharge my batteries so that I could be better at care for others. But notice the **purpose** involved. Good self-care is always done so as to be better able to care for others. That’s part of the JOY acronym: others before self, and self for others. Notice in the Gospel that when Jesus goes away by himself, his “family” follows him. They need him, they cry out to him for help. And after what probably wasn’t as much time for himself as he wanted, he returned to serving their needs. I’m betting every parent here has had that experience: deliberately finding time and space for yourself to recharge, only to hear that voice: “Mom? Dad?”

Self care has that purpose of recharging, which means it is different from simply “wasting time.” Wasting time is an end in itself. A really great example of this is having dinner together as a

family. The purpose isn't really to eat, because we could do that separately more efficiently, not take as long, and get back to being productive. Family meals aren't meant to serve a purpose. They are a purpose in themselves, to spend time with loved ones, with no agenda.

Another really great example of purposelessness is prayer and worship. What purpose does it serve? If our approach to prayer is to get something from God, we're doing it wrong. Similarly, God doesn't really need anything from us, so our goal can't be to give Him something. Prayer is simply wasting time with someone we love, namely God.

This is true in a special way of the Mass. We come together to worship God. And if our goal is to get something out of the Mass, we're probably doing it wrong. Think about family activities: if our goal in doing something together as a family is to get something from each other, we're approaching our family relationships as useful, when really we should just be giving of ourselves, and wasting time together. Similarly, if our approach to Mass is "what am I getting out of this?", we're probably not going to get as much as if we simply approach Mass as wasting time with the God we love, and with the parish family we love.

There's some irony here: the less we try to get something out of Mass, the more we end up getting out of Mass. But isn't the same thing true of all of our relationships? The less we're actively trying to get something from someone, the more we actually receive. Isaiah tells us that what is truly important in life is found simply by coming to God. Endless work cannot truly fill our hunger.

My approach to vacation this last week was simply *to be*. To be with good friends. To be with God. To not try to force rest and relaxation, but simply to have time without purpose. Self-care is important, but it's even more important that we waste time. Very often wasting time has the added benefit of relaxation and rejuvenation, but that can't be our goal.

The book of Genesis tells us that when God created the world, he established the seventh day as a day of rest. God doesn't need rest or relaxation or rejuvenation. And God certainly didn't need to prepare himself to get back to work. God wasted time, and he demonstrated that wasting time is a legitimate and even necessary part of life. So for homework this week, I'm going to encourage everybody to waste some time: waste time with family, waste time with friends, and waste time with God.