

# ENCOURAGEMENT ENCOURAGEMENT

JULY 2104– Issue 36

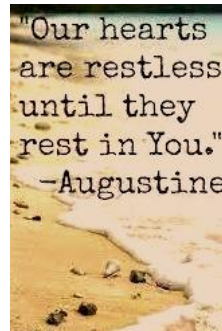
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## HOLIDAYS and Holy days!

How often do we wish people a happy or good holiday without really thinking of what we are wishing them? Of course we are hoping that they take a rest, have time out, enjoy themselves, see family and friends and generally stop the general everyday thing that we engaged in. For many it is a time away from work or rather paid employment, and is now seen as a mandatory period away from this. Indeed it has been hard won in the western world with laws to protect exploitation of people that can lead to exhaustion or illness. This of course is not true universally and in many countries people still work with no respite. In this sense a holiday is a privilege experienced by those in wealthier countries and almost unknown in others. Yet we are frequently assailed by advertising which tries to tell us that without this we are somehow failing and that it is an imperative and a sign of status which must be pursued at all cost. So with as much energy, as work we try to satisfy this need to be seen to be resting or holidaying, often spending more than we can truly afford so increasing our work activity later, a curious paradox.

Clearly respite and recreation are essential in a balanced and fulfilled life. There are many such occasions in our lives of celebration and exploration that require us to pause and simply enjoy life in a different environment. They are also essential for learning new things and meeting new people a blessing in itself... Yet there are people who so enjoy what they do that a holiday is not actually important to them, there are others who find work in itself a blessing and derive great energy from what they do. Sometimes, of course, to cover difficulties in their lives for then it is almost frightening to pause and reflect. But nevertheless we should consider what it is we are doing when we 'holiday' and its purpose.



At school a teacher of the 'old school' used to remind us in no uncertain terms that with an emphasis which meant business.. 'it may be a holiday from school, children, but it is not a holiday from God', reminding us that we still have an obligation to go to Mass pray etc. In days past families (and some still do) would try to go where they knew that they could go to Mass. This comment though perhaps seen as a little amusing should make us think more deeply.

It may come as a surprise to some that the old English meaning of holiday, '*hāligdæg*' means *holy day!* Holidays were given to people on special Saints days and Church feast. This is still the custom in many lands, some more than others. These were times of stopping from work to attend a special religious festival and enjoy camaraderie in fellowship. Holy days today however are seen as, at best a time of duty and there is a sense in which they're reduced in order to fulfil this obligation rather than a time of great thanksgiving and joy. The poet Wordsworth once wrote 'rest and be thankful'... a good way to look at a feast day. Indeed every day should be a 'holy day' in which our focus should be on thanksgiving and prayer and delight to be so loved by our Maker that we are grateful for this privilege of being alive. Even in the most adverse of circumstances there is that all abiding knowledge that we are Redeemed people.

But what of holidays as such? They are indeed a way of stepping out of the ordinariness of life and can be richly rewarding to us. There are of course many ways of celebrating them in different situations. Whether they are with family or friends

watching children play on the beach, chatting to one another about many things or doing nothing, engaging in what is called 'quality time' together, each should be an opportunity to step back, assess and question. Are we doing all we can to draw close to God? Are we bringing about God's Kingdom to fullness? What can I change to improve life for others and myself and become more compassionate loving cheerful? Admiring a beautiful scene or area too can bring us closer to the reality of God's presence as Creator and infuse us with peace and calm. All this is more easily attained when there is less pressure on us with schedules and time restrictions. Jesus himself took this kind of 'time out' when the crowd pressed on him or when walking with the Apostles. (Matt 14:23) There are of course other opportunities too for doing this. These time away or times to pause which we often refer to as 'retreats' though it is more a time to 'go into' rather than 'escape' from our lives are special times which can draw us to a kind of resting place and peace or radical transformation. Not holidays in one sense they too are Holy days and a gift.

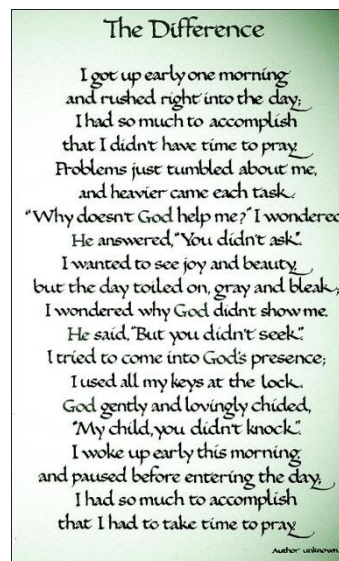
But in the very ordinary, sense, resting, pausing, enjoying, meeting are all situations that bring us to some form of prayer and a meeting with the purpose of being created. It is worth considering perhaps taking a spiritual book to read, one once hoped to have read and never quite got around to..?

So what of the scramble for holidays so often seen and many times over... A famous spiritual writer once wrote....'*And so we take a holiday, a vacation, to gain release from this bondage for a space, to stand back from the rush of things and breathe again. But a holiday is a respite, not a cure. The more we need holidays, the more certain it is that the disease has conquered us and not we it. More and more holidays just to get away from it all is a sure sign of a decaying civilization; it was one of the most obvious marks of the breakdown of the Roman empire. It is a symptom that we haven't learned how to live so as to re-create ourselves in our work instead of being sapped by it. A car should always be charging its battery as it runs. If it simply uses up without putting back, it has to go into dock to be recharged. It is not a sign that we are running particularly well if we are constantly needing to go into dock.*' Evelyn Underhill

But what if we cannot go on holiday and work very hard to support family and those in our care? In ours and many others societies there are many such people indeed often the majority. For everyone there is an opportunity of some respite if we would but look over our shoulders to help. A hour out, for someone who never goes out, a carer young or old, for today many a

young children have great responsibilities for others, or visit to a sick friend can be a source of a holiday, a holy day and blessing for both giver and receiver.

For the person who cannot leave their situation there is also a chance to allow a few moments for prayer and rest as the following prayer poem suggests.



What sort of holidays then are we going to have, ones that recreate us, renew and restore us or bring about a comment so often heard... 'I am now more tired than when I went away'? Or ones that make us just that little bit happier and holier?

**Pope Francis and Resting...** Papal aides say that Francis I "eats work and thrives on a hectic pace, despite having had a lung removed " But he is conscious of his limitations and cancels events if he is feeling tired or ill... 'Do we need to rediscover the meaning of leisure?' Pope Francis replies: "Together with a culture of work, there must be a culture of leisure as gratification. To put it another way: people who work must take the time to relax, to be with their families, to enjoy themselves, read, listen to music, play a sport. But this is being destroyed, in large part, by the elimination of the Sabbath rest day. More and more people work on Sundays as a consequence of the competitiveness imposed by a consumer society." In such cases, he concludes, "work ends up dehumanizing people." Pope Francis<sup>1</sup> Rome '14.

#### Prayer intentions for July...

Sport... That sports may always be occasions of human fraternity and growth.

Lay Missionaries: That the Holy Spirit may support the work of the laity who proclaims the Gospel in the poorest countries.

**Feast days in July:** 3<sup>rd</sup> St Thomas the Apostle,  
16<sup>th</sup> Our Lady of Mount Carmel 22<sup>nd</sup> St Mary Magdalene  
23<sup>rd</sup> St Bridget of Sweden. 25<sup>th</sup> St James the Apostle  
26<sup>th</sup> Sts Anna & Joachim 31<sup>st</sup> St Ignatius of Loyola