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How to Use Time

It sounds presumptuous, but we all use time. Time is a gift from God and we decide how we shall use it every day. But our decisions of how to use time are not always good, nor are they equally good. Time, of course is misused when it is used for sin. And there are other times when we use time, not sinfully, but certainly not as well as we might.

The wonderful thing is that the Christian Religion has the secret when it comes to the use of time. It is found in a very simple but profound teaching: "Remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath Day." For Christians the Sabbath, the day of rest, is Sunday, the first day of the week, the day of our Lord's resurrection.

For some of us Sunday is a day for traveling to see relatives, for golf or any number of sports, for leisure of various kinds, for undone chores. It seems to us that the best way to enjoy life is by using this one day to do only what we want to do.

But these are not all equally good. Visiting relatives is certainly a higher good than a game of golf. Helping out a friend is better than trimming the hedge. All of these are goods, and yet none of these is truly the best way to use the Sabbath.

Our faith teaches us that true and enduring rest, the kind that calms the soul and refreshes with newness of life is found only in the worship of God. When our Lord said that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath (Mark 2:27), he did not deliver the day of rest into our whim. He took from it the cold legalism of an outward obedience, and gave it the pleasure of peace.

How is regular worship on Sunday really restful and full of pleasure? By virtue of this spiritual fact. We participate directly in the Word and Sacraments of God. And in doing so we grow as persons. Our time is spent not in the struggles of this busy world, but in the healing motions of the Spirit. The truth is there is no better way to love and to be loved, to confess and to be forgiven, and to offer the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, than to keep the Lord's Day.

The reason why this is so is simple. When the Sabbath Day and its habit of worship anchor your week, the whole of time, not just your week, but your week and month, and year, and lifetime, are given a unity, a unity that molds the particular time that you have been given by God into a personal life.

And so unity comes from the weekly experience of loving the Lord your God first of all, with all your heart and soul and mind. He is your Creator and Redeemer. The weekly worship of God as your first love orders all of your loves from the highest to the lowest.

Put in another way, worship gives you the opportunity to collect your self. Through keeping the Sabbath we are able, by grace, to gather together the past, and the present, and the future. This is how the Holy Spirit makes persons.

Let me explain. To consider the past before God is both to praise him for his gifts, given throughout our life, and to confess to him how often we have misused them. Only then can we return to him the praise for all that he has done in creation and redemption.

To consider the future is to make a resolve to do those things "left undone" that we ought to have done. It is to look through the lens of God's Word, the Sacraments, and yes, the sermon, and to see the possibilities of new life for oneself and one's family.

After reflection on the past and anticipation of the future we settle in the present. The present is when we experience the joy that is akin to eternity. In prayer and praise to God, we hold the past and the future in him who is always present. We cast all our care on him who cares for us, we pray for grace to continue in his holy fellowship, and thus we experience the fullness of rest which is nothing else than peace. The better prepared we are for Sunday worship, the more we experience this reality, the more we become persons, conformed to the image of God.

When God rested on the seventh day from all his works, he rested in the goodness and joy that are himself. Also, he loved all that he had made, knowing each and every thing in the perfection of his idea and intention. God is our Sabbath rest, to whom Jesus brings us by his perfect sacrifice. Every Sunday, the day of resurrection, the Lord's Day, we partake in some measure of that final rest. This is ultimately what it means to use time well, to keep the Sabbath holy.

There are some who will object that regular attendance at Church becomes routine, monotonous, sterile, and empty. I am sorry to say that the reason they find it so is because of what they bring in their own soul. They complain about the music or the sermon or the fact that so and so did such and such. But in reality they are not prepared to worship God. He himself seeks those who will worship him in spirit and in truth. He has no time for those whose spiritual life is a mirror of their own agenda.

The Church has another element in her secret in the use of time. It is the glory of the liturgical year. Our pattern of worship protects us from making our attendance merely self concerned and therefore predictably boring. We are taken from season to season, from feast to fast back to feast, in order to conform the time of our lives to the life of Jesus Christ. The year is not static, it moves, but always within the purpose of God to teach us over and over again the substance of who God is and what he has done.

Finally, it is our duty to worship God every Sunday in his Church. The

fourth commandment, "Remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath Day" is given for our good, that we might find our lives, where they truly are, in God. How we use our time determines what we become. If we neglect the time given us to draw close to God, we shall only develop the habit of living without him. Such is the deception and character of sin. And sin fully conceived is death. So use your time wisely to enjoy the goodness of your Creator and Redeemer. Let this verse of Scripture be your attitude of mind and heart: "I was glad when they said unto me, 'We will go into the house of the Lord' " (Psalm 122:1).

The Rev. Dr. Michael L. Carreker

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