

De Sales

SPIRITUALITY CENTER

"Holiness: All Work? No Way!"



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Mary D. Ford

"All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy."

Not only might it make Jack dull: it might cripple his attempts to be happy, healthy, and even holy.

Make no mistake. Growing in holiness - making real in our own lives the love of the God in whose image and likeness we are created - is serious business. It requires hard work; it requires discipline; it requires self-examination; it requires commitment.

As Francis de Sales would say, it requires devotion.

But Salesian spirituality also recognizes the value of relaxation, of taking 'time out,' of 'catching your breath,' of making time for play. In fact, relaxation is not only permissible: it is necessary!

Francis de Sales claims: "It is actually a defect to be so strict, austere and unsociable that one neither permits oneself nor others any recreation time."

The Introduction to the Devout Life (1609) contains ample evidence of the Gentleman Saint's appreciation of the important role that recreation plays in the pursuit of a fully human, God-centered life. He says: "From time to time we must recreate in

mind and body."

He continues: "To take the air, to go for a walk, to enjoy a friendly chat, to play music, or sing or hunt...are such honest diversions that the only thing needed to utilize them well is simple prudence, which gives to all things their rank, time, place and measure."

To be balanced, we need to know our limitations. St. Jane once wrote in the context of a letter to a member of her community: "I must run, for I have little leisure and my arm and hand are starting to tire and hurt, even though I've just begun to write. I'm not able to do as much as I used to."

In his book Touching the Ordinary, Robert Wicks identifies practices that can help us establish and maintain a balanced life: get enough sleep; eat right; practice leisure; pace yourself. Learn to laugh; focus on values; practice self-appreciation; be involved, but not too involved; have a support group; escape on occasion; be spontaneous; avoid negativity. Establish good friendships; practice intimacy.

Of course, there are also the spiritual practices - pray; participate in the life of the Church; celebrate the sacraments; read Scripture and other material that

nourishes the soul.

Our Lord Jesus Christ spent virtually his entire public ministry meeting the needs of others: healing, teaching, feeding, challenging, forgiving; in short, working. But the Gospels that document Christ's work ethic also clearly document those times when he withdrew from his activities to rest, to renew, to enjoy another's hospitality, to spend time with friends, all helpful in rededicating himself to doing the Will of God.

There are plenty of ways to achieve balance between work and play, livelihood and leisure, pay and play. Consider them in a personal, prayerful manner. Choose those consistent with the state and stage of life in which you find yourself at this time: what works for others may not work for you. Realize that as your life changes, so too may your means for achieving this happy, healthy and holy balance.

As you travel along the highway of life, take your foot off the gas now and then. Ride with the windows down. Pull over on occasion. Visit the rest stop. Check out the scenic overlooks. Balancing work and play will not only help you to reach your destination in one piece, but it may enable you to truly enjoy the trip!