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Rest

Part One

Hospitality is the process of welcoming others, encouraging our guests to make themselves at home through an invitation to be themselves and to rest. Of all these components making up our notion of hospitality, the one that is all too often least understood or understood inadequately is that invitation to rest.

But what do we mean by rest? For most of us the rest we seek is usually associated with our home that place – however construed – where we go in search of physical repose. At home we try to reduce our activities to a minimum in order to take the time necessary to relax.

At home, then, we seek to rest from our daily exertions, as we free ourselves from toil, strain, stress, and tension. Pulling back from our engagement with work, we reach for a loosening up, a letting go, a release from physical demand. As we try to give our bodies relief from the hectic, hurried push and pull of our everyday work activities, we hope to relinquish at last that daily need ‘to get things done’.

All too often in our workplace we contract our bodies as we over exert ourselves. This bodily tension is most assuredly an obstacle to physical rest. When and if we do physically relax and become less labored, only then do we manage to restore our energy, strength, and power.

Physical repose however is but one dimension of rest. Indeed, as we move beyond physical repose, we sense a yearning and a need for emotional rest. That yearning resides in the urge to quiet our emotions, relax our minds, tune down our thoughts, and give rest to our over stimulated bodies. This urge will remain unsatisfied as long as worry, anxiety, and inner noise conspire to deprive us of emotional rest. Quieting our inward activity helps us to come to our senses. Solitude, privacy, and silence allow us then to slowly and naturally sink without effort into emotional rest. And when our emotions find rest we experience peace and serenity.

The deepest dimension of rest is spiritual. As a state of being, spiritual rest is a stilling, a peace, a contentment of mind and soul in God. The attainment of spiritual rest invites us to contemplate while remembering that the roots of our true home are in God. The transcendent, the sacred, the mystery beacons us in our weariness to rest in the stillness of His living waters where our soul will be restored.

In spiritual rest we experience the fullness of life supporting us in every moment. As we rest in Being, we will dwell in the house of the Lord. All creation becomes our resting place – our home – where we grow in confidence in God’s protection, refuge, and strength. As we dwell in that home we experience God’s graciousness and mercy. For it is always God who invites us to draw near where rest is given to us.

In spiritual rest, then, we remember and experience that God is the creator upon whom everything depends. We are reminded that everything is the work of a providential God. Such an understanding must lead us to concur with St. Augustine: “our hearts are restless until they rest in God.”

When we rest in God we are made meek and poor in spirit in the full evangelical sense of the terms. These dispositions thus help us to live abundantly. Herein we find true rest for our soul. It is a rest that only can yield security and serenity in harmony with the mysterious Ground of life. In such a way we rest in the arms of a loving Father who is our refuge and fortress. And it is this rest – His rest – which is ultimately the only dependable rest.

Spiritual rest allows us to pause in order to appreciate and experience the presence of God. Mindful of God’s presence we surrender more and more into God’s loving embrace. In surrender to rest we remember that God is our protector and our assurance.

Spiritual rest is therefore surrendered rest. As we pursue our lives in ever increasing meekness, we find that God will give us rest. As we grow in gentleness and humility we find ourselves ever more capable of enduring injury with patience and without resentment. Moreover, we become more moderate in our actions, more gentle in our behaviors. Lack of pretentiousness becomes more pronounced. Thus we are more of who we really are, i.e. precious and gifted, fragile and insecure, cherished and redeemed. In this way we accept full vulnerability as we empty ourselves and enter into God’s fullness.

When that moment comes and our full surrender is complete in the acceptance of God’s law, only then our soul will find true rest. Only there will we experience the blessed relief which comes with a self acceptance the void of pretense. God grants us rest and meekness is the method.

In our next newsletter we plan to explore more fully the question: What is rest from our human formation perspective?