

The Rest of Ordinary Time

(Column 82, September 5, 2022)

By Lucia A. Silecchia

Whenever someone asks how I am, one of my most frequent replies is “*Good, but busy.*” That is rarely more true than it is in September’s back-to-school season.

For those whose lives ebb and flow with the school year, as does mine, autumn bursts into our lives with a rapid increase in the events, activities, gatherings and obligations that will again fill our days.

For those whose days are not directly driven by school life, there is still something about the fall that brings a rapid new rhythm to life as parish activities, clubs, sports teams and community events get underway after a hiatus. Indeed, after the past two years, this return to community life seems to have an extra urgency about it.

The rapidly filling pages of my calendar are welcome to me since I like the busy-ness of life. Yet, there is also much to be said for the wisdom of rest.

The commandment to “*keep holy the Sabbath,*” and the Biblical traditions of sabbaticals and jubilees are reminders that time is sacred. In a particular way, they are a reminder that there are certain times that deserve to be safeguarded from the demands of our daily lives.

The Catholic Church proclaims the dignity of the work, the value of labor and the importance of treating workers with respect and concern for their well-being and that of their families. A critical demand of Church leaders through the decades has been ensuring that workers are free on the Sabbath to worship God and to be with their loved ones. As Saint John Paul II wrote in *Laborem Exercens*, his encyclical on human work, workers have a “right to rest” that “involves a regular weekly rest comprising at least Sunday.” This Sunday rest from work would allow the worker to meet obligations to God on a day of worship.

He went on to say that “man's work too not only requires a rest every seventh day, but also cannot consist in the mere exercise of human strength in external action; it must leave room for man to prepare himself, by becoming more and more what in the will of God he ought to be, for the rest that the Lord reserves for his servants and friends “

These words are worth considering as life fills up again. As demands on our time increase, it is tempting – and can often even feel necessary -- to treat Sunday just like any other day. This would let us catch up in a fast-paced world and not fall behind in what seems to be a constant seven-day whirlwind of shopping, working, answering emails, and doing the work that just did not get done in the six workdays of the week.

School sports and similar activities – good as they may be in their own right – split families apart on Sundays as they race in different directions. Sunday can all too easily become merely the start of the new work week.

Yet maybe the start of the new season of busyness is a time to resolve to keep Sundays holy, to keep them sacred, and to appreciate the wisdom of a God who rested on the seventh day.

In a paradoxical way, this season of new busy-ness is launched with Labor Day, the civic (but not meteorological!) end to summer. Since 1894, when President Grover Cleveland signed a bill establishing our national Labor Day, it has been celebrated as a federal holiday honoring the contributions of workers to the social and economic life of the nation. One of the most significant achievements of the secular labor movement was the drive toward the 5-day work week. This should, in theory, free modern laborers for the worship and re-creation of a Sabbath rest. Yet, in a sad irony, we often surrender this freedom to the temptations to many things that creep into our Sundays.

Maybe this year, as I watch the pages of my calendar fill up, I will take a special look at those things with which I fill my Sundays to see if they honor God and serve my loved ones. I also hope to do so with appreciation for the ability to do so ... something that I know so many do not have.

I hope you will have the chance, too, to celebrate Sundays as a slice of the extraordinary that comes to each week of our ordinary time.

Lucia A. Silecchia is a Professor of Law and Associate Dean for Faculty Research at the Catholic University of America. "On Ordinary Times" is a biweekly column reflecting on the ways to find the sacred in the simple. Email her at silecchia@cua.edu.