

## 19<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time “Vacating Versus Recreating”

Bishop Frank Schuster

We all need vacations from time to time. However, in our culture there seems to be two ways to go about it. One way is to approach a vacation as a time to escape, to forget, to vacate our minds, to take a break from our daily reality by being immersed into something completely and fantastically new. I think of places like Disneyworld or Las Vegas, perhaps even movie theaters at times as examples of places where people can go to completely escape, to be entertained, and for a little while, to forget about our normal lives. And there is nothing wrong with this kind of thing in moderation. However, there is another way to plan a vacation that is summarized by the word re-create, where we get the word recreation.

Instead of seeing vacation as a time of escape and a time to forget who we are, recreating in my mind is about seeing this time as an opportunity to retreat and reflect, allowing God into the mix as we look to where we are at in our lives at present and where we are going. The first sense of vacation of escaping and forgetting, can at times feel like we are self-medicating. The second sense of vacation with its focus more on reflection and prayer feels like an opportunity for growth. Does this distinction make sense to you, vacating versus re-creating?

The culture in which we live seems to encourage vacating more often than recreating in my opinion. After a hard day at work or school the temptation might be to return home, open that bottle of wine or beer after beer, and sit in front of the television for hours or, if you are younger, play video games into the middle of the night, or mindlessly surfing the web and going to sites that are simply not good for anybody, like pornography sites. Why do people go to pornography sites? At the root of it, I think the idea of going to pornography sites is to vacate, escape, self-medicate, and forget. I think all addictions start out that way, alcohol, drugs, sex, gambling, the list goes on. We live in a society that encourages these addictions. Our society demands so much of people, it piles on so many responsibilities and expectations, and then sells us a million ways to vacate. It can turn into a vicious cycle which we could identify as funny if it weren't so tragic. People work to make money so that they can afford the things, activities, and addictions that help them to forget about work, which of course puts them into deeper debt, ironically causing them even more work! Welcome to America folks.

Recreative activities on the other hand tend to be a lot less expensive because these activities usually involve eating together as a family around the table, taking genuine interest in each other's lives, or playing a card game together with family rather than staring at a screen, even taking time for prayer together, perhaps a little spiritual reading in the evening, activities that instead of escaping or vacating our world seek instead to re-create and reinforce our relationships and vocational choices. Do you see the difference? Again, I am not

saying that having a little vacating in our day is necessarily a bad thing. I am not going there. There are healthy ways to do that. What I am saying is, a bit like the story about Mary and Martha, re-creative activities are better. I think we can all agree with that.

Why am I making this distinction between people who vacate themselves during free time rather than recreate themselves? Let's listen to the Gospel reading again, and as I read it, think about what kind of person is Jesus looking for in his disciples? And then, let's ask ourselves during these warm summer months, what does this mean for me? Here we go:

“Jesus said to his disciples: ‘Gird your loins and light your lamps and be like servants who await their master’s return from a wedding, ready to open immediately when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those servants whom the master finds vigilant on his arrival... You also must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come.’”

There it is. What is your impression? It seems that Jesus is inferring that there are two different kinds of disciples, one type that seems to consistently vacate and forget, the lamps are not lit, and another type of disciple who always keeps the lamps lit, keeping watch in life, always prepared for when the Lord returns.

I think the implications of what Jesus is offering us today are staggering and go beyond how we schedule our free time. I believe Jesus is asking us the haunting question: are we going through life trying to maximize the opportunities to forget about our lives and getting caught in that vicious circle? Or are we instead going through life trying to maximize the opportunities to enrich our lives by the light of faith? I believe the answer to that question will also reflect how strong our relationships are at present, even how responsible we are with our time and money, and how prepared we are for unforeseeable future events. This is because people who vacate too much are going to have issues in these areas more so than people who keep their lamps lit and are keeping watch.

Yes, my friends, there are two ways we can approach a vacation, just like there are two ways we can approach life. One way of approaching life is to maximize ways we can forget about our lives. The other way to approach life is to maximize the ways in which we embrace the meaning of our lives as disciples of Jesus Christ, to remember rather than forget, to reflect rather than escape. And so, Jesus reminds us today, “Blessed are those servants whom the master finds vigilant on his arrival.” And we are blessed, my friends, we are blessed when in everything we do, whether we are at work or on vacation, that we always keep our eyes on Jesus Christ who is the way, the truth and the life.