

# THE YOUNG FRANCISCAN

Summer Edition, January 2023  
Vol #21

## Holy-days

**Holiday** time is once again upon us. For many of us that means watching all the latest movies, sleeping in, lounging around, and catching up with friends.

Leisure is a good thing, and we are all entitled to a good rest. However, like all activities, our leisurely activity needs to be taken in moderation. Too much leisure can lead to developing lazy habits, also known as sloth.

How we spend our time of leisure says a lot about our inner selves, and is usually a good indication of what our hearts are really attached to. So, if my leisure is excessively self-focused, then it is an indication that I have an inordinate love of self. Whereas, if I truly desire to spend my time of leisure in a more service-centred manner, or in a more family-oriented environment, where it is not just about my own comfort, but about connection and service, then it is an indication that what I like to do is somehow connected with love of God and love of neighbour.

If you want to measure the goodness of yourself, this is best done while at leisure, when you are filled with free time to do whatever you like. While at leisure, don't ask yourself "what will I do", but rather, "what is it that I would really like to do?". Then you will know where your heart is.

This then also becomes a good indication of how close, or far we are from developing good Christian virtues. Perhaps your leisure

time is used to develop a God-given talent, or to perform an act of charity by helping around the house, or visiting someone who is lonely. Perhaps your free time has opened up the opportunity to read more of the bible, pray more often, or attend an extra weekday Mass. Such measures would indicate that your heart is close to God.

If we were to get to the end of our holidays and realise that in fact, we did not make any use of all that extra free time to develop our Christian spirituality, then perhaps this is an indication that our hearts are not as close to God as we may have thought.

God has graced us with the gift of holidays, but with that comes a great responsibility. Our rest and recreation must be balanced with a healthy amount of spiritual growth. If we can afford to spend many hours of the day entertaining ourselves, then surely we can devote a portion of that time to spiritual activities as well. We must be on guard to avoid becoming sluggish and self-focused. While engaging in *right recreation*, we must be careful not to allow any form of entertainment to develop into unhealthy attachments.

Holidays are like a retreat. They are a time to rest from our usual hectic schedules, and to make most of our extra free time in developing our spiritual virtues. By doing this our holidays become holy-days. We should get to the end of our holidays feeling refreshed in Christ, and ready to face the challenges that await us.

# Holiday 'Symptoms'!

At time we can all become guilty of a little too much holiday indulgence. Some of the more common 'symptoms' associated with holiday leisure may include:

Endless movie time

Avoiding duties

Lack of motivation

Excess laying around

Feeling sluggish all the time

Becoming "experts" on our devices

Unwilling to engage in difficult tasks

Sleeping in - beyond reasonable explanation

Getting upset when someone interrupts our excess rest

Such "symptoms" can often result in a spiritual plunge, where we do not burn with love for God or for spiritual activity, such as praying, going to Mass or performing an act of charity towards a neighbour or family member.

## A Holy Holiday

Holiday time should be seen as an opportunity to free oneself especially for the spiritual good. One of the most important habits to maintain during this time is some form of routine that includes daily spiritual activity.

Perhaps you may like to enjoy the extra time sleeping in each morning, however, don't overdo it. Setting your alarm for an extra half an hour longer than what you would normally sleep is adequate for some extra rest, and will ensure that you still have many hours in the day to be productive.

Begin each day, as you normally would, with prayer. Since you now have extra time, perhaps double your prayer time. You may like to read the gospel of the day as well as the saint of the day.

Each day make time to say one entire Rosary, it only takes twenty minutes. At noon it is always encouraged to pray the Angelus; and at three O'clock pray the Divine Mercy Chaplet, which takes less than ten minutes.

Do you attend daily Mass? If not, holiday time is the perfect opportunity to attend at least one extra Mass throughout the week in addition to Sunday. If Mass is not available, it is desirable to visit a church and spend some quiet time in prayer before our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.

Are you able to limit your daily device/TV time? Watching wholesome Catholic movies (many of which can easily be found online) as an alternative to Hollywood blockbusters, can lead to the virtue of right recreation.

Try to avoid the urge of laying around for no good reason. Forcing yourself to get up is an act of the will, and helps you develop the virtue of self-denial. Remember to offer all sacrifices, no matter how small they are, up to God for a good intention.

Finally in the evening, finish each day with prayer. It is always a good practice to make an examination of conscience to see where we may have pleased God, or perhaps offended him.

# How Saint Francis Rested

Accounts from the Early Documents of St Francis of Assisi

Jesus Christ crucified always rested like a bundle of myrrh in the bosom of Francis' soul, into Whom he longed to be totally transformed through an enkindling of ecstatic love.

And as a sign of his special devotion to him, he found leisure from the feast of the Epiphany through forty successive days — that period when Christ was hidden in the desert—resting in a place of solitude, shut up in a cell, with as little food and drink as possible, fasting, praying, and praising God without interruption.

He was lifted into Christ with such burning intensity, but the Beloved repaid him with such intimate love that it seemed to that servant of God that he was aware of the presence of that Saviour before his eyes.

***The Life of Blessed Francis – Major Legends, Chapter IV***

Finally, his custom was to be so secret and quiet in rising for prayer that none of his companions would notice his rising or praying. But in the evening he made a good loud noise in going to bed, so that everyone would hear him as he went to rest.

***The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul Chapter LXIV***

Francis turned all his time into a holy leisure in which to engrave wisdom on his heart, so that, if he did not always advance, he would not seem to give up.

If visits from people of the world or any kind of business intruded, he would cut them short rather than finish them, and hurry back to the things that are within.

He always sought out a hidden place where he could join to God not only his spirit but every member of his body.

***The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul, Chapter LXI***

Francis in his flesh rarely or never had any rest, as he travelled throughout the many distant regions, so that the willing spirit, the devout spirit, and the fervent spirit which dwelt within him might scatter everywhere the seed of the word of God. He filled the whole world with the gospel of Christ; in the course of one day often visiting four or five towns and villages, proclaiming to everyone the good news of the kingdom of God, edifying his listeners by his example as much as by his words, as he made of his whole body a tongue.

***The Life of St Francis – The First Life, Chapter IV***

It was a custom for the angelic man Francis never to rest from the good, rather, like the heavenly spirits on Jacob's ladder, he either ascended into God or descended to his neighbour.

For he had so prudently learned to divide the time given to him for merit, that he spent some of it working for his neighbour's benefit and dedicated the rest to the tranquil excesses of contemplation.

Therefore, when he emptied himself according to the demand of times and places to gain the salvation of another, leaving the restlessness of the crowds, he would seek the secrets of solitude and a place of quiet, where freeing himself more freely for the Lord, he would shake off the dust that might have clung to him from the time spent with the crowds.

***The Life of Blessed Francis – Major Legends Chapter XIII***

When he was forced to sleep, the bare ground was his bed, with only his short tunic in between, and he would more often sleep sitting than lying down, with his head on wood or stone.

***The Life of Saint Francis by Julian of Speyer, Chapter VI***

# Secular Franciscan Saints



## Bl Vitalis of Bastia d. 1491

Born in the little Village of Bastia, about five kilometres from Assisi, Vitalis was brought up in the faith by devout parents. As he grew older, he developed into a man of deep prayer and love for God. Vitalis joined the Third Order of St Francis as a single unmarried man. He then sold what little possessions he had and gave the money to the poor. In 1470 he moved to the hills behind Assisi and lived as a hermit next to the little chapel of Santa Maria di Lendiola. There he remained in solitude until his death, leading a life of deep prayer and meditation. Vitalis practiced long hours of prayer throughout the night, and had a strict diet of vegetables and water. At times he was tempted to return to the comforts of his home, however, keeping his heart firmly in God, and through the intercession of Our Lady, he always emerged victorious. After his death, Vitalis was buried in the chapel of our Lady where he resided. One hundred years later his remains were relocated to the Church of San Rufino in Assisi.

## St Bridget of Sweden 1302-1373

Bridget was raised in a pious family. Shortly after her birth, her saintly mother died, leaving her father to bring up the young girl. At a very young age Bridget was attracted to religious, and things of the spiritual nature, and at the age of ten was granted a vision of the Crucified Jesus which affected her so deeply on seeing the unspeakable torments of the suffering Christ. In her early adulthood Bridget married Prince Ulf, a young pious man of solid virtue. Together they joined the Third Order of St Francis, which gave strength to their marriage and in raising their eight children. After the death of her husband, Bridget divided her estate among her children and the poor, clothed herself in a poor garment and began to live a life of strict penance for the Lord. She devoted her time to charity work in the service of the poor, built a convent, and founded a religious order of sisters. She also fought for the return of the Papacy back to Rome. Having had received more extraordinary graces and knowledge in the mysteries of the Lord, she died in 1373 at the age of seventy-one years.

## Bl Queen Blanche 1188-1253

The holy and pious Blanche is notably honoured as the mother of St Louis IX King of France, himself the Patron of the Secular Franciscan Order. After the death of her husband, King Louis VIII, to whom she was happily married for twenty-six years, Blanche was entrusted with the government of the country until her twelve-year-old son had reached maturity. As the mother of the future King, Blanche raised her son in holiness and Christian virtue. She often said to her son, "I would rather see you dead at my feet than stained with mortal sin." So strong was her love for holiness that she even preserved her son from venial sin. Both Blanche and her son Louis joined the Third Order of St Francis in their desire to strive for Christian perfection. Her saintly son on reaching maturity governed the country in a most Christian like manner. Having such confidence in her, Louis once again placed Blanche in charge of the governance while he travelled to the Holy Land with his army. He returned in 1253 on the news of his mother's death.

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'Secular Franciscan Saints' are adapted from the Franciscan Book of Saints, by Marion A. Habig OFM