



A HAPPY ROMAN HOLIDAY

Posted on July 1, 2023 by Father Luc de Bellescize



Why are we Roman Catholics? Because Peter and Paul bore witness to the greatest love, in Rome. Because the Pope is Peter's successor, charged with strengthening his brothers in the faith. Of course. The heart of the Church is not in Lausanne, where everything is regulated like a precision clock, where no pedestrians obeys crossing signals, or throws a piece of paper into Lake Geneva for fear of being denounced by a citizen mindful of his collective responsibility. It's not in Berlin, where work is rigorous and the mind is not inclined to the unexpected or to whimsical mentalities. It's not in the City of London, where frantic, ultra-connected men chase money like Speedy Gonzales, their eyes glued to screens, on which they monitor the course of the world.

No Fuss

Our Church is in Rome, where everything is never so dramatic, where the Tiber flows lazily through the creamy color of the old stones, like a hazelnut coffee. It's Rome where Audrey Hepburn toured on a Vespa, where lovers throw coins into the Trevi Fountain, where we drink chilled limoncello on a summer's evening. In Rome, it's unthinkable to imagine waking a cardinal between noon and 4pm, or expecting an answer before time has largely resolved the issue. Only the Eternal City can manage temporal affairs without giving in to the spirit of haste. The Church has eternity, the world is running behind time. The tragedy is to lose the Roman spirit, i.e., fidelity to faith and the courage of witness, but also the dolce vita that makes life so beautiful. The risk is in forgetting that the Church leads to the port of the Eternal, just as a ship sails through the shores of the temporal, between the contradictions of the world and the consolations of God.

How many are busy "doing nothing" (2 Thess. 3:11). They imagine a Church that suits them, according to their all-too-human reforms, their worldly perspectives and their short-sighted orientations. They reduce it to a little traffic between friends, by dint of political calculations, vain slogans and power struggles. They no longer let God be God. We are in the world, but we are not of the world. We need to live *ad orientem*, without getting too agitated along the way, not placing our whole heart in the affairs of the world, "keeping our soul in peace and silence" (Ps 130).

Entering God's Rest

"How many people work in the Vatican?"

"No more than half," replied good Pope John. "You're very lucky, I'm just Christ's vicar," he replied to La

Madre, who introduced herself as the "Superior of the Holy Spirit." He had that sense of humor that never takes itself too seriously, and teaches us the true measure of our days. Deep down, he knew that not everything rested on him, that it was necessary to know how to enter into God's rest without pretending to govern, foresee and plan everything. "Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap, nor gather into barns, but your heavenly Father feeds them" (Mt 6:26).

The darkest cloud always has its golden lining. He was no idler, however, and his reassuring build concealed a sharp conscience, attentive to the extreme in the care of his soul. He minded God's business and God minded his own. He combined Augustine's "cor inquietus," the noble concern for salvation and the quest for a holy life, with the words of the great Thérèse: "Nada te turbe.. Let nothing trouble you, O Lord! Let nothing trouble you, O my soul. Let nothing frighten you. God alone is enough." He worked tirelessly, but quietly took his siesta.

You have to be able to sleep a little, which means accepting God's hand. Accepting that life is slipping away. Consenting to die in the end. Death is a habit to get used to. Learning to rest prepares our soul for the Requiem. There are many calls to watch in the Gospel, but there are two calls to rest: "Stand aside and rest a while" (Mk 6:31). And in the great violence of the Passion, this paradoxical word: "From now on, you can sleep and rest" (Mk 14:41). No doubt this vacation is a time to learn how to sleep. "Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Mt 11:28).

To sleep is to let go, in the humility of knowing that not everything depends on our actions, and that God Himself rested on the seventh day from the work He had accomplished. "He who does not sleep is unfaithful to hope," writes Péguy in the *Porche du Mystère de la deuxième vertu* (*Porch of the Mystery of the Second Virtue*). Hope begins when man, that "well of anxiety," can do nothing more than what he has already done. He then lets the Lord correct, sanctify and complete his work. He falls asleep "like a little child against his mother" (Ps 130), having played the beautiful game of his life all day long. Then "the seed grows," day and night, "we do not know how" (Mk 4:26). So it is with the Kingdom, the Lord tells us. We collaborate in it, but it is not our work. The essential escapes us. Life always runs away from our tightly-knit hands.

Learning to Sleep

Let Péguy eulogize the night, "the dark and sparkling daughter":

O Night, O my daughter night, the most religious of my daughters,
The most pious
Of my creatures the most in my hands, the most abandoned...
You glorify me in sleep even more than your brother the Day glorifies me in
work.
For man in his work glorifies me only through his work.
And in sleep it is I who glorify myself in man's abandonment.

God watches in silence, in His eternal quietude. "He neither sleeps nor slumbers, the guardian of Israel" (Ps 121). Here's the prayer for this summer: "Give me, Lord, to do what I must to the best of my ability. The rest is in your hands."

"The glory of God is the living man," said Saint Irenaeus. The glory of God is also the sleeping man. So, happy Roman vacation!

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[Featured](#): A view of the Vatican from the Medici Gardens, by Antonietta Brandeis; painted in 2018.

