

Session Four: March 24

REST: Receive the gift of God's grace, peace, and restoration

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. – John 14:27

*Blessed are you, O Lord ... giving rest to the weary, renewing the strength of those who are spent.
– Book of Common Prayer, 113*

From the beginning of creation, God has established the sacred pattern of going and returning, labor and rest. Especially today, God invites us to dedicate time for restoration and wholeness - within our bodies, minds, and souls, and within our communities and institutions. By resting we place our trust in God, the primary actor who brings all things to their fullness.

Pete's Comments. I really like this, with one quibble: God doesn't "invite" us to rest, God commands us to rest (Exodus 20:8). Our society has taught us that Sabbath is an expendable luxury and that rest is for the weak (as opposed to work). I have more than a few friends who say to me, "I'll sleep when I'm dead." In the face of the Ten Commandments such an attitude borders on blasphemy.

In my experience, the problem with Sabbath rest is that it brings too much "alone time," time for the Holy Spirit to convict me of my sins and shortcomings. How is that restful??

(Freebie for the day: The Greek word for sin is αμαρτια [hamartia], which is an archery term for "missing the mark." Look at how the word "martial" appears there, and remember that an "a" in front of the any Greek word turns it into its opposite. Thus, martial/order, becomes a-martial/disorder, chaos. We also talk of martialing our resources and martial arts.

Now... because it's Palm Sunday we get a deeper look into this! The Greek word for devil is διαβωλος [diabolos, dia-bolos], Spanish diablo, English diabolical, right? A bolo is an ancient weapon that is thrown, and a modern bolo tie represents the old weapon. The preface "dia" usually means "through," but it can also mean "apart" or "away from." Thus, the diabolos, or diablo, "throws apart" or "scatters."

Put it all together, and we get sin as missing the mark because the devil threw off our aim and scattered our resources. Not only that, but now think of Jesus' lament over Jerusalem: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. (Matthew 23:37) Jesus longs to gather us, "but we would not." The Holy Spirit seeks to bring order out of chaos, but sometimes we insist on going our own way.

Sabbath is the place/time/situation in which we allow God to do what God does best, even if it occasionally makes us uncomfortable in. And, because we are sinners, this is not an invitation; it's a command.

For Reflection and Discernment

- What practices restore your body, mind, and soul?
- How will you observe rest and renewal on a regular basis?
- With whom will you commit to create and maintain a regular practice of rest?

Pete's Questions

- 1. Let's start with the negative: What have you allowed to keep yourself from observing Sabbath?*
- 2. Exodus tells us that the Sabbath is to be observed on the seventh day, Saturday. Jews (and Seventh-Day Adventists) continue to observe Sabbath on Saturday, but the early Church changed it to Sunday, the day of the Resurrection. Do you find it necessary – or even helpful – to set aside a particular day of the week or hour of the day for Sabbath? Or is it more a case of “catch as catch can?”*
- 3. This series loves partnerships, and it's always asking who we are going to partner with as we pursue its virtues. The idea of “spiritual direction” has been around since the earliest days of the Church, and countless people today use a Spiritual Director to help them. Professional people have mentors, and people in various types of recovery have sponsors. Do you see the need for a spiritual guide in all of this?*
- 4. Associated with spiritual direction is a “Rule of Life.” Monastic orders all have them, along with whatever life-long vows their members take, i.e., poverty, obedience, chastity, stability, etc. Lay people connected with monasteries and convents are also often required to follow a rule of life, which includes the disciplines of labor, study, and prayer. Would you find adopting a rule of life for yourself a helpful exercise?*