



*Three*

# Rest, Recreation, & Renewal: Luxury or Duty?

*Times of rest or recreation . . . are as important  
in our daily lives as is work itself.<sup>14</sup>*

What I identified as a problem in the foregoing chapters—the precedence of work or apostolate over prayer—sets us up for further problems. Accordingly, a brief chapter on the sometimes ambiguous character of those moments between work and prayer that we give to rest and recreation is in order. “Ambiguous” for a couple of reasons.

First, because some feel guilty or useless whenever they’re not doing something. Either they consider it an imperfection to play or rest, or a waste of time not to

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14. Escrivá, *Friends of God*, no. 10.

have material results to show for time spent doing . . . nothing. It was likely to these that St. Josemaría directed his comment:

Certainly it is necessary to rest, because we have to tackle our work each day with renewed vigor. But, as I wrote many years ago, “to rest is not to do nothing. It is to turn our attention to other activities that require less effort.”<sup>15</sup>

Or to someone completely depleted and needing to be told it’s okay to cease and desist for a time:

Physical collapse. You are worn out. Rest. Stop that exterior activity. Consult a doctor. Obey, and don’t worry.

You will soon return to your normal life and, if you are faithful, to new intensity in your apostolate.<sup>16</sup>

Nothing inhuman here, but rather a clear recognition of the limits of the human machine to work or do anything without sufficient rest. Here is your reminder, if you need it. If you cite those instances when St. Josemaría praises “work without rest,”<sup>17</sup> let’s be clear that he does not mean “never rest,” but that when we work, we should be tireless in our efforts. In other words, to do everything

15. Escrivá, *Friends of God*, no. 62.

16. Escrivá, *The Way*, no. 706.

17. For example, see Escrivá, *The Way*, no. 373; Escrivá, *The Forge*, no. 65.

with its proper intensity. It is the same in physical training or working out: you push through your reps, you sprint with all your might, because if you rest while doing either, you never make progress. It's only after you've spent your energy that rest is in order. Consider: "By neglecting small details you could work on and on without rest and yet live the life of a perfect idler."<sup>18</sup> Lacking the intensity and diligence proper to our work turns work into a hobby or pastime instead of a divine work.

The second ambiguity regards the value of what we call recreation. Not all diversions are created equal: if it becomes self-indulgence or dissipation, no renewal of spirit is possible. "Renewal is not relaxation"<sup>19</sup> is St. Josemaría's way of saying that simply to slacken our efforts, although providing rest for the body, does nothing to refresh the soul. Relaxation, in other words, does not automatically replenish the soul with inspiration and zeal. Hence, for the apostle, how we spend our downtime matters as much as how we act when we're "on."

Clearly, every exertion creates a need for rest and repair, even for the zealous apostle. The Lord sanctions such rest when he calls his men away for a little while to recuperate after their work. Significantly, his insistence comes on the heels of the apostles' enthusiastic report

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18. Escrivá, *Furrow*, no. 494.

19. Escrivá, *Furrow*, no. 176.

regarding “all that they had done and taught” (Mk 6:30). The Lord’s response isn’t, “Great work! Now get back out there and keep going!” He responds as much to their need for humility as to their need to renew themselves in solitude. In other words, although joy and gratitude are called for when we have accomplished what God has given us to do, the apostle must take great care not to rest in his accomplishments.

They had been handling some tremendous power: casting out “many demons” and healing “many that were sick” (Mk 6:13). Or, as the seventy disciples exclaim, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!” (Lk 10:17). To press pause in the midst of all this success seems counterintuitive. Why not keep going, keep exorcising and healing? Because inevitably a fallen man begins to believe that he commands the power that flows through him. Better not do anything than do a lot of good things with God on the end of your leash.

For this reason, St. Josemaría puts “rest or recreation” on equal footing with work itself. That’s saying a lot. It is also saying something that St. Thomas Aquinas saw fit to address in the *Summa*:

Just as man needs bodily rest for the body’s refreshment, because he cannot always be at work, since his power is finite and equal to a certain fixed amount of labor, so too is it with his soul, whose