

14th Sunday Ordinary Time Year “A”

July 8-9, 2017

Temples of the Holy Spirit.

Readings: Zechariah 9: 9-10; Romans 8: 9, 11-13; Matt. 11:25-30

“Come to me, all you who are weary and are burdened, and I will give you rest.” Indeed, these are comforting words from Jesus as related in St. Matthew’s Gospel. Clearly, Jesus was speaking mostly of a spiritual weariness; however, I am increasingly convinced that his words may also be applied to our physical and psychological health and well-being.

Having enjoyed the long holiday weekend, even taking in two Twins games, I stepped on the scale on Wednesday to see that I had added a few pounds during that same time frame. It was just enough to remind me that care for the body is still an important duty as we seek to treat our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit.

As human beings, we are a composite of body and soul. Together, they form who we are, and the emphasis on one to the exclusion of the other fails in a key aspect with respect to human anthropology.

In Sacred Scripture, the term “soul” often refers to human life or the entire human person; we also rightly use the term to refer to the spiritual principle in man, that by which we are most especially created in the image and likeness of God. Body and soul are not two natures united, but rather their union forms a single nature:

“Man, though made up of body and soul, is a unity. Through his very bodily condition he sums up in himself the elements of the material...For this reason man may not despise his bodily life. Rather, he is obliged to regard his body as good and hold it in honor since God has created it and will raise it up on the last day.”¹

¹ Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, # 14,1

It is solidly rooted in Scripture and Tradition that we ought to care for our bodies. It is not a matter of mere vanity, though that surely must be avoided. It is a matter of recognizing that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. Our second reading reminds us that we should not live by the flesh, but by the spirit. This can be confusing because sometimes we hear the word soul, other times we read spirit. When St. Paul uses “spirit,” it signifies that from creation man is ordered to a supernatural end and that his soul can be raised beyond all it deserves to communion with God.

When it comes to a choice, especially in our moral lives, there is clearly priority given to the soul, to our supernatural end and calling. However, as males and females, we are images of the power and tenderness of God and as such, we give glory to God by means of our bodies. No, we do not fall into the trap of making our bodies like unto gods, and they were not created to be occasions for vanity and lust.

On the other hand, when we let our bodies deteriorate through a slothful lifestyle that makes no time either for proper exercise and a balanced diet, or through other unhealthy habits, we are no longer glorifying God through our bodies. Instead, we either glorify ourselves or give into our appetites, becoming slaves to them.

Yes, we need to be refreshed and rested. However, while it may seem counterintuitive, sometimes we feel tired precisely because we are not getting any exercise. And while exercise is grueling, especially at first, it actually strengthens us. After about six weeks, if not a little sooner, you will begin to feel much better and more energized. But you have to put in the time, get on a program, even if it begins with 15 minutes of walking and working your way up.

The important point is to begin, to be active according to your state in life. Watch your diet, not your television; be disciplined and the rewards will soon become evident. You may rightly complain about what I am saying if you take up the challenge. But after a few weeks, you might just start to agree.

We desire and need to be refreshed both in body and soul. The Eucharist is of prime importance and priority in renewing us spiritually. May our summer activities never outweigh our need to receive this great Sacrament. Let us pay attention to all of our needs and respond generously, even as we sincerely appreciate the periods of rest the summer often affords us.