

“FROM THE RISING OF THE SUN TO ITS SETTING”: BODY CLOCKS AND TIME ZONES

“Our flight time to Amsterdam will be...” The moment I hear the pilot’s announcement, I **adjust** my wristwatch to the time of the city into which I am flying. It is difficult to “fool oneself” into thinking it is seven hours later than your body tells you, but it is the best way I know to overcome **jet lag**. Upon morning arrival, I force myself to be bright-eyed and bushy tailed and sprint to the nearest **espresso!** The sooner I begin to “adjust” the better! Time zones may be traced to the advent of railway schedules in the late 19th century. I covered this topic in an earlier column in 2020. Most of the year, we are seven hours behind Rome. I wrote “normally” because since the U.S. extended daylight saving time (yes, not “savings”) in 2007, we now spring ahead two weeks earlier than Rome, so the confusion only grows when I tune into the Sunday Angelus!

Daylight Saving Time began in 1908 when, on their own volition, the towns of Port Arthur and Fort William (now Thunder Bay), Ontario set their clocks ahead one hour. Globally speaking, Germany and Austria-Hungary introduced it for their entire nations in 1916. The rationale was to minimize the use of artificial lighting to save fuel for the war effort. When the **Uniform Time Act** was signed into law on April 13, 1966, DST began on the **last** Sunday in **April** and continued until the **last** Sunday in **October**. In 2022, the dates are March 13 and November 6, an addition of **five weeks**. Mastering a time zone map is a little like memorizing multiple digits of **pi** (π): 3.1415926— an endless task! Side note: Would you like to stand in multiple time zones simultaneously? The intrepid thrill-seeker who ventures to the precise tri-point where **Norway, Finland, and Russia** meet will be rewarded with the satisfaction of being able to stand in **three time zones** at once. Imagine the havoc that would wreak with your iPhone’s internal clock!

In addition to juggling 24 zig-zagging time zones, we also **change** our own **clocks** twice each year, leading many people to question the practice. Add to that the fact that Hawaii and Arizona opted out, and Indiana only adopted it in 2006, and it gets confusing. Opponents of switching clocks twice yearly point to Circadian rhythms. I’ve **never understood** this phrase, so I did a little digging around. Like so many words, Latin comes to the rescue. From the Latin *circa*, (“around”) and *dies* (“day”), the term is defined as a 24-hour cycle that is part of our body’s internal clock. There is such a thing— it’s no fiction. It is regulated by our hypothalamus. These rhythms are coordinated by a small set of neurons. I’ll say this much— I am a believer in natural body clocks. Mine generally is spot on, I suspect mostly because I am such a creature of habit.

Here’s the \$64,000 question in this DST debate: Is the biannual disruption counterproductive? Would we be better off just **leaving our clocks alone?** And if so, year-round daylight time or standard time? Doctors and researchers at the **American Academy of Sleep Medicine** are **opponents** of year-round DST. AASM’s Erin Flynn-Evans said: “There is no question that putting an end to seasonal time change is best for Americans’ well-being.” But she added, “However, a shift to permanent daylight time—which would result in **more morning darkness** in the winter— would result in most people experiencing a misalignment between the body’s daily rhythm and the timing of routine social obligations like work and school.” The organization favors year-round **standard time**, as it most closely matches the circadian sleep-wake cycle. To be clear, I enthusiastically support staying put— #locktheclock! But **which version** should we have here— Central Standard Time or Central Daylight Time?

Proponents for DST point to increased evening daylight. A 2015 article in the journal *Anesthesiology* explores the concept of daylight as therapy—by this they mean the sun, **not** a light

bulb. “Standard indoor lighting is not an effective substitute for sunlight,” the authors posit. The **Sunshine Protection Act’s** sponsor **Senator Marco Rubio** (R-FL) points to reputable studies that DST reduces crime and decreases seasonal depression. But **hang on** just a second! The day before we returned to CST last November, the sun rose at 7:58 a.m., while in Rubio’s Miami, it rose at **6:33 a.m.** If we maintain DST year-round, **sunrise** here in late December wouldn’t occur until **8:50 a.m.**, while on picturesque Miami Beach it would be 7:07 a.m. Miami’s **shortest** day of the year (Dec. 21) boasts **10:30:48** of daylight— **ours** has just **8:46:00**. Living in Minnesota is **different** than Florida. Think kids, bus stops, total darkness. Living in a near the western edge of a time zone is different that the eastern part. Sorry, but I need to be convinced that year-round DST is a good idea.

“From the rising of the sun to its setting.” (cf. Eucharistic Prayer III) I typically wake **before my alarm** goes off. In the **rare** case in which I go to bed later (e.g., the Easter Vigil!) or following Midnight Mass— the **bane** of a morning person’s existence— I still wake up at the same time! For me, the natural rhythms work and are part of an **ordered life**. How does my body know the time? I suspect it is a combination of the Circadian rhythms and a penchant for keeping a strict schedule. Hey, for me it works. The day has a **natural flow** to it. Before you get too giddy about 9:03 p.m. MN sunsets in June and jump on Senator Rubio’s bandwagon, think about winter mornings! I’m curious to see where this all goes.

- Want to assist our Ukrainian brothers and sisters? UST Theology Professor Paul Gavrilyuk is President of **“Rebuild Ukraine,”** a non-profit working to provide food, medical supplies, and protective gear for Ukrainians. Click the PDF above for more information or e-mail: plgavrilyuk@stthomas.edu.
- Our Catholic Schools are doing an **outstanding job** with in-person learning. On Palm Sunday, the **Aim Higher Foundation** will be present at coffee and donuts to provide information about their important work in assisting families with tuition scholarships at our Catholic grade schools. I enthusiastically encourage your support.
- Recent car jackings in St. Paul’s Highland Park neighborhood are most concerning. Please know that during Masses, our **security staff** is watching the parking lot on camera. However, please do your part by **never leaving** anything of value visible on the seats. Be alert! Do not provide an attractive target for thieves.
- Court is in session and the **jury is in** on the latest Minnesota Twins acquisition. Signing Houston Astros free agent **Carlos Correa** is a game changer! Arguably the second-best SS in the majors (Padres SS Fernando Tatis Jr. is currently injured), Correa hits for average and power and is a Gold Glove fielder. **Complete package**. The Pohlad’s are serious (i.e., \$\$\$) about trying to improve.
- I invite your assistance with our **Easter Flower Collection**. Please know that these donations are **used exclusively** for decorations throughout the liturgical year. Envelopes may be found in the pews.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector