

HOLIDAYS: A TIME OF STRENGTH OR OF WEAKNESS?

July 1955 Editorial

To begin with, what do we call 'holidays'? I would define them as a time of interruption of normal work: schoolwork, remunerative work or housework. From which we conclude that whereas students and men generally have holidays, this is not always the case for the mother of a family; yet she needs them as much – if not more – than the other members of the family (fathers of families, please note!).

In the aftermath of their holidays, I often observe in parents what teachers observe in students, namely a lowering of spiritual quality: the springs have slackened. Has an increase in physical vitality to be paid for by a lowering of spiritual vitality? That would be very disappointing, yet nothing is more evident.

Where does this lowering come from? Is it because we inevitably or deliberately abandon our customary religious exercises? ...Perhaps - but not necessarily. This is not the first reason, it seems to me, for this weakening. There is an interior reason. On holidays, love is no longer my motivation; 'what suits me' becomes my rule of life. Games, sleep, walk, reading - everything is governed by this one sovereign law. Let me make myself clear. It is not resting, relaxing or sporting activities that I find reprehensible (albeit that some adjustments may be necessary) it is the motive: 'because it suits me'. It is the perpetual thinking of self and therefore not thinking about God or about others; it is my own preferences to the detriment of others' preferences. Whereas, throughout the year, having scant opportunities to do what suits us, we try to do the will of God (if not always seen as God's will, at any rate in terms of duty), once on holidays, we go into reverse. As if, to take a rest from loving and serving God and others for eleven months of the year, we are at last surely entitled to love and serve ourselves. We put love on holidays and selfishness takes over in the meantime.

That is the mistake. Love has no holidays. You don't stop breathing during holidays; do you? So, don't stop loving; love is the soul's breathing.

You are quite right to take a break from your normal activities, but do so precisely because it is the will of God and, in so far that it is his will, do it out of love for him. Let love be awake, alert, vigilant and prompt. Let it be even more so than usual. Breathe deeply, love deeply ! The soul, like the body, needs to rebuild itself, to renew itself and it is loving that renews the soul. Holidays should be – must be – precisely a time when it is easier to love God and others. It is easier on holidays to love God because creation reveals the glory of God. It is easier on holidays to love others because we have come out of our breathless life and we can leisurely and together discover, marvel, read, speak to one another at length... Being a time when it is easier to love, we must therefore practise loving more, loving better. Then holidays will fulfil their purpose: they will be a 're-creation'; they will recreate each one of us; they will recreate the bonds between the soul and God, between husband and wife, between parents and children, between brothers and sisters. Holidays make it possible to create new bonds with the people of the village; with relatives and friends we meet.

Back at home, we can resume our work. Our soul is stronger; our vitality has increased.

Your holidays will have been the highlight of your year, because you will have made them a time to love.

Henri Caffarel