

Take God Along on Your Vacation **A Meditation on Christian Relaxation and Recreation**

- I. In your body
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Introduction

Vacations play a prominent part in the modern American way of life.

Inconsistently enough, even the most materialistic citizen of our Country, who subscribes wholeheartedly to the maxim that “all work and no play makes JACK”, will at the same time champion the proverb that “all work and no play makes jack A DULL BOY”; and thus we find that employers generally make generous provisions for, and employees usually welcome enthusiastically, at least one period of the year which can be devoted to relaxation and recreation.

A magazine called “Holiday” report (XVI:1:115) that during a recent year no less than 82,353,000 American vacationers toured The United States, and tens of thousands more went over to other countries.

The time is past when most people of our nation live and die within their own little cramped confines without trying their wings at least a little bit. Most people follow the bear over the mountain to see what they can see; and thereafter become quite adept at boring friends and relatives by recounting what they saw in never-ending and ever-continuing repetitions.

Vacations and Christianity

Vacations are also a definite part of the Christian way of life.

In The Old Testament

In The Old Testament regular periods of rest were established by nothing less than divine injunction.

For human beings

Thus we find that The Third Commandment called for one day of rest out of every seven. Here is the original wording of this part of The Decalogue (Ex. 20:8-10): “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work; but the seventh day is the sabbath of The Lord, thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work.”

For animals

Such rest was not only established for the sake of human beings; it was also instituted for the welfare of animals. For The Law of Moses also had this to say (Ex. 23:12): “Six days thou shalt do thy work; and on the seventh day thou shalt rest, that thine ox and thine ass may rest.”

For land

In fact, in olden times a regular vacation was even provided for the ground, as these words testify (Ex. 23:10, 11): “Six years thou shalt sow thy land, and shalt gather in the fruits thereof; but the seventh year thou shalt let it rest and lie still.”

In The New Testament

Our Blessed Lord likewise recognized the wisdom of going on a vacation in order to escape from the constant demands and duties of this mortal life.

After His disciples had had an especially trying time of it, we have Mark’s word for it (Mk. 6:31) that He said to them: “Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest awhile.”

Summary thus far

Thus we see that vacations fit into our American culture and also into the Christian philosophy of life, and are one of those little but vital things that make life so much more worth the living.

A Christian vacation

But, of course, there are vacations, and there are vacations.

A CHRISTIAN’S vacation should be a CHRISTIAN vacation: there must be something about it which makes it decidedly different from the vacation of an unbeliever.

An analogy

And if you were to ask what this certain something is, you could find it hinted at in a certain story from The Bible (see Gen 22:1-19).

It is the story of a father and his son.

A voice comes to the father: “Abraham!”

The father answers: “Behold, here I am.”

The voice is God's: "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into The Land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of."

The next morning the journey begins.

And now comes the significant words: "They went both of them together." That means the father and the child.

If you can see in those six simple words an application to your vacation, then you know what a Christian's vacation should be like. If you can see in that father and his child an analogy which fits for you and God as you leave home to visit the vacationland of Moriah, then your holiday will be a hallowed one. Blessed are you if the holy angels up in Heaven can watch you pack and leave, and then, with reference to God and you, say the winsome words: "They went both of them together."

The admonition

This, then, is the admonition which Holy Mother Church lays upon your heart for your holidays, so that even in your relaxation and recreation you may be distinguished from a wicked and an irreligious world: "Take God along on your vacation!"

I. IN YOUR BODY

Important words

For one thing, make arrangements to take Him along in your body.

The secret

If such a statement sounds strange, it sounds strange only to him who does not understand the sublime mystery connected with The Blessed Sacrament of the Altar.

It is in The Holy Eucharist that we receive BREAD AND WINE to eat and drink.

But there would be little in our holy religion to constrain us to come to The Lord's Table if we ate and drank only that and nothing more. With the bread and wine we eat and drink THE VERY BODY AND THE VERY BLOOD of our Blessed Lord.

And not a mere DEAD body and some INANIMATE blood, but the body and blood of our LIVING Lord.

So that in The Blest Communion our Lord Jesus Christ—God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God—ACTUALLY LIVES IN US, this statement being equally true both of His Godhead and of His humanity.

The reverend fathers of The Lutheran Church realized how almost unbelievable this profound mystery is, and therefore they incorporated it repeatedly and unequivocally in The Lutheran Confessions, that no one might someday presume to arbitrarily abrogate or subtly emasculate it. Here, for example, are their words in The Apology of The Unaltered Augsburg Confession (X:57):

“We defend the doctrine received in the entire Church, that in The Lord’s Supper the body and blood of Christ are truly and substantially present, and are truly tendered with those things which are seen: bread and wine. And we speak of the presence of the living Christ, for we know that death hath no more dominion over Him.”

Wherefrom it follows

Now, that being our belief, how perfectly natural and reasonable that it should lead us to The Table of Our Lord regularly and frequently, and especially direct us there-to prior to vacationtime, so that when we leave, we and God may leave together.

Early Christianity

In the early days of The Christian Church participation in The Blessed Sacrament was something easy and convenient; that is when it was celebrated every day. And a devout Christian could receive it on any occasion.

Early Lutheranism

Also in the early days of Lutheranism, when the strength of our Church was not sought in social activities or numerical growth or imposing building programs, but in faithful exposure to The Gospel as it is found in Word and Sacraments, the earnest child of God could commune whenever the circumstances of life moved him to do so, for The Lutheran Mass was devoutly celebrated on every Sunday and on all the extra holy days in the church calendar, of which there were not a few.

Today

In our own day and age (and this must be admitted with embarrassment) The Lutheran Church does not emphasize the Sacrament as she once did. And Lutherans will probably have to go out of their way to receive Holy Communion as a preparation for vacation.

Still, they can make a point of receiving it on the nearest “Communion Sunday” in their parish, or of acquiring it in private.

Thus Christ will be united with them in the closest possible union, they dwelling in Him, and He in them.

II. IN YOUR HEART

Faith

Secondly, take God along on your vacation in your heart.

And that means: see to it that He lives in your heart by faith.

Faith in God's forgiveness

When we speak of Christian faith, we think first and foremost of the fact that our sins are forgiven us through the precious blood of Jesus Christ.

And we must be quick to confess that without such trust in The Cross, a vacation would give little joy, because happiness is impossible when conscience is not at peace.

Faith in God's protection

But Christian faith on a vacation includes also another kind of trust, and that is confidence in God's providence and protection.

A person leaves home nowadays and exposes himself on the highways of the world to a thousand different dangers and disasters. He is therefore liable to start out on his vacation with a multitude of misgivings, and becloud the sunshine of every day away with wearisome worries and fretful fears.

What else is that but distrust of the gracious guidance of God!

A Christian applies the words of The Scriptures (Ps 23:4),

“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil;
For Thou,” O God, “art with me;
Thy rod and Thy staff:
They comfort me,”

also to his vacation.

Not that he is reckless and irresponsible. He does not tempt God by disobeying the rules of safety, by driving while intoxicated, by going over the speed limit, by swimming in forbidden waters, by ignoring caution and common sense. As ever he uses Christian discretion.

But, above and beyond all that, he leaves all things to God's direction. That is when he is as confident as ever that God shall give His angels charge over him, to keep him in all his ways, and to bear him up in their hands, lest he dash his foot against a stone (see Ps 91:11, 12).

God's love

The love of God is as wide as the world: no Christian's vacation can ever be spent beyond its boundaries.

To believe that is to take a vacation from WORRY, and to know that The Everlasting Arms are underneath (see Deut 33:27).

III. IN YOUR MIND

Blessed thoughts

Take God along on your vacation also in your mind: let your thoughts be constantly occupied with His goodness and His grace.

Nature

Rejoice in the wonders of creation; let them remind you of the inspired words (Ps 19:1):

“The heavens declare the glory of God,
And the firmament sheweth His handiwork.”

Freedom

Rejoice in the freedom which is ours in The United States of America, given to us in divine mercy and preserved for us by divine benedictions, which enables us to see our Country's rocks and rills, her woods and templed hills, unmolested and undisturbed.

Possessions

Rejoice in the material means you have—your automobile, your clothes, your money—which permit you to leave home and see this big, wide, wonderful, beautiful world.

Health

Rejoice in your health: that you are not confined to a weary bed of sickness, but can travel around where you will.

Bless God

Gratitude to God should fill your heart at all times: well, then, especially on your vacation—every day of it filling your mind with the thought (Ps 103:1-5):

“Bless The Lord, O my soul,
And all that is within me, bless His holy name!
Bless The Lord, O my soul,
And forget not all His benefits:
Who forgiveth all thine iniquities;

Who healeth all thy diseases;
Who redeemeth thy life from destruction;
Who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies;
Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things,
So that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's!"

IV. IN YOUR LIFE

Conduct and conversation

Take God along on your vacation fourthly in your life: in your way of living, in your conduct and conversation.

Consecration

Every Christian needs to be reminded of the fact that a vacation from the duties of his secular calling is never a vacation from the obligations of his Christian calling. A vacation enables him to escape from such things as cleaning house and mowing the lawn and going to work, but it does not enable him to escape from obedience to The Ten Commandments.

It is significant that the word "holiday" is a combination of the two words: "holy" and "day". Also your holidays are to be holy days: hallowed by your loyalty to the principles of your religion.

God's omniscience and omnipresence

The God who established those principles is everywhere and knows everything.

Let the Christian lock his door as he starts out on his vacation with this realization in mind (Ps 139:1-12):

"O Lord, Thou hast searched me, and known me!
Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising;
Thou understandest my thought afar off!
Thou compassedest my path and my lying down,
And art acquainted with all my ways!
For there is not a word in my tongue,
But lo, O Lord, Thou knowest it altogether!
Thou hast beset me behind and before,
And laid Thine hand upon me!
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
It is high: I cannot attain unto it.
Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit,
Or whither shall I flee from Thy presence?
If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there!
If I make my bed in hell, behold, Thou art there!

If I take the wings of the morning,
And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
Even there shall Thy hand lead me,
And Thy right hand shall hold me!
If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me,
Even the night shall be light about me.
Yea, the darkness hideth not from Thee,
But the night shineth as the day;
The darkness and the light are both alike to Thee!”

The Christian’s love

And even if that were not true—even if God were not an omniscient and an omnipresent God—the devout child of God would still want to spend his vacation in a God-pleasing manner. For he loves his religion: he loves The Saviour who founded it; he loves The Cross around which it revolves; he loves the laws which it champions; he loves the Heaven to which it leads. And that love will compel him to live as a Christian should live, whether at home or abroad.

Therefore!

“Whether, therefore, ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do”—also on your vacation—“do all to the glory of God” (I Cor 10:31)!

V. IN YOUR SUITCASE

Worship aids

Finally, take God along on your vacation in your suitcase.

By that is meant: when you pack, include the things that will enable you to worship God while you are gone, both in public and in private.

Private worship

For private worship, in which you should engage every day as usual, take along your Bible, your prayer book, a devotional booklet.

Then use them in harmony with The Psalmist, who said (Ps 55:17):

“Evening and morning and at noon
Will I pray and cry aloud,
And He shall hear my voice.”

Public worship

For public worship, in which, as always, you should participate on every Sunday and all other feast days, take along The Lutheran Annual. It will help you locate a Lutheran church in your vicinity, and thereafter you have but to make contact with it to determine the time of Services.

Who will be the wiser?

No one will be the wiser as to whether you worship God on your vacation or not.

No one, that is, outside of God Himself and your own conscience.

CONCLUSION

Work

As wonderful as a vacation is, for a Christian it dare never be an end in itself. A vacation is given to him for recreation: for re-creation, for renewing his strength, to the end that he may better serve God and his fellowmen.

Life is primarily for work, and not for play.

Rest

When that work is well done, God in His grace will bless His faithful children with an endless vacation up yonder.

His Book contains the promise (Heb 4:9): "There remaineth a rest to the people of God."

And the admonition (Heb 4:11): "Let us labour, therefore, to enter into that rest."