

Living the Spirit Conversation Two

Once again I am taking the opportunity to write in a more personal way as we live in the days of summer. I know that many of you have plans for some kind of vacation. I always noted when I visited England that the people always referred to their holiday, rather than vacation. A holiday is meant to be a joyful time. I must believe that the word itself once meant holy day. In the Middle Ages there were a great many holy days. It was a way in which the Church helped the workers of the time to enjoy some little respite from their daily grind. Perhaps the days of summer can be holy days for us all.

Can there be anything spiritual to learn from a time of summer relaxation? I surely hope so. One must live the Spirit in all the ordinary ways. Time spent for vacations can be times when we touch some aspect of the spiritual life. Perhaps it is a learning experience.

In the summer of 1963 I was a student priest just finishing my first year of studies at the Lateran University in Rome. Our residence at the *Casa Santa Maria* had to begin its summer schedule. From July 5th to August 14th there would be no such things as meals (other than breakfast), hot water etc. Everyone was encouraged to travel. Today students probably go home to the U.S.A. At that time Bishop McShea did not allow me to do so. He wanted me to see something of Europe. And so I did.

Looking back to the past as people my age often do I see that time with its positive aspects. I traveled through Italy and went on my way to Austria. Summer in Europe was delightful. I knew where to stay from the long lists available at the *Casa*. Some of the places were remarkable; others were simple. One simply did not know. So there was a sense of adventure.

I saw many of the things that tourists pay a great deal to see on tour. There was much beauty in the great architecture around you. One entered buildings of great age and saw works of art that have been admired for years. At that time there still were a few reminders of the War. I recall in Köln a Pieta – very modern – that moved one to think of its horrors. It spoke of the union of man's sufferings with the compassion of a loving Mother. Who else but Mary, who knew what suffering really was?

I began a time of my life when I thought to add up seeing the many Cathedrals of the world I was privileged to be in. I thought then, as I still do, how the faith was central to history. I thought of how in every place Jesus had been there, adored and asked for the help by the generations of those who came to pray.

I was able to spend far more time that summer in places that are visited in a hurry for a day or two by most tours. In Paris there was a residence open to priests. It was called the *Fraternite Sacerdotale*. There I was given a good Green Guide and told by the priest-manager to walk and use the Metro to visit all that I could. So I did. But I always managed to get back for the main meal at 1:00 P.M. No one was invited to the table,

unless they had visited the chapel for prayers at 12:15. I was not alone, praying with a varied group – in French! Recalling those days, I realized how universal the Church was. In fact, I don't think I was ever to be the same. I became able to value the many varieties of faith, as it unfolds in different cultures of place and time.

My itinerary took me to the Netherlands, Belgium, France, and Ireland and ended in Switzerland. I recall the oddity of visiting the cathedral in Geneva, dedicated to St. Peter, but very devoid of anything Catholic. In fact one finds there the chair of John Calvin, the reformer. [He was the founder of the Presbyterian Church as it is called today.] I saw as I said Mass in the Catholic Cathedral a statue preserved as a reminder of past days of challenge to the faith. It was of the Blessed Mother with a part of the face chopped out. You can imagine what I thought about it, and what one might think about it today. When a society loses its tolerance of others, it always seems to want to attack Mary. Perhaps, even motherhood. In our land does not our pro-choice politics seem to do the same?

Later in my life I was able to visit more of Europe and see much more of what its glories were and are. I never forgot that my goal was to broaden my faith. Soon I came to settle on London and parts of England as the destination of my vacations. I never failed to visit the places that recalled that the Church still is present there. On a personal note, how often I was able to think of Mary in so many of my travels!

It has been a number of years since I have managed a vacation with travel. I suppose many of my readers can say the same. I do not regret that I do not find the way of travel anymore. Like Dorothy in Oz, I believe there's no place like home. But I have managed to make many days of summer a time of rest and relaxation. And I just had the experience of my retreat which always comes in June. A real spiritual plus.

I often would preach in past days the message that we must not take a vacation from God. We really deceive ourselves if we forget the truth that God is present everywhere. It is all a matter of finding Him present to our attention. He does not want us to avoid all the many joys of creation that he has placed for us. He sends His Holy Spirit to remind us from time to time that He is present in others who surround us in life. We must not find Him only as we enjoy vacation times; we must try to know His Presence daily.

So, I come to an end of a very rambling writing about living the Spirit in summer days. Is there any spiritual message in what I have written here? May you have the grace to find it. Being able to live the Spirit is a gift always at hand. Reach out for it. This is the Year of Mercy!

*God love you always!
Monsignor Morrison*

Lord, have mercy! Christ, have mercy! Lord, have mercy!