

RECREATION AND SILENCE

In treating of the proposals dealing with recreation and silence, we found ourselves in a dilemma. We seemed to be dealing--not with two polar concepts--but with two completely disparate topics. Proceeding on the assumption that the use of the word recreation has been extended too far or conceived too narrowly, we will attempt to define its variant uses and examine time. First, its ordinary use:

The purpose of recreation is to fulfill the need of a person for relaxation, refreshment, and growth. Ordinarily recreation is defined as "a worthwhile, socially accepted leisure experience that provides immediate and inherent satisfaction to the individual who voluntarily participates in an activity." While implying elements of "play," recreation does not suggest primary growth as play does in the case of the child. Rather its value lies in the fact that it serves the need for relaxation from effort and tension. It aims at "psychological and physical balance by bringing into action areas of the body and mind that are neglected in one's daily occupations and it hopes to rest muscles, nerves, and brain cells that become tired or overstrained in the pursuit of one's daily living and working." It is for these reasons, perhaps, that the term "re-creation" is employed. Inherent, therefore, in this definition of recreation as "fun" and "withness." Ordinarily, one does not recreate formally or alone.

Recreation, according to its second usage, applies solely to the passing of time--to a passivity framed within the barriers of time and place without meaningful reference to the persons involved. Such may be and in some instances has been the recreation place on the community horarium. Herein the "withness" is merely one of physical propinquity; in spirit, those present wait out a sentence with boredom and fruitlessness.

In its third sense, recreation is broadly conceived and takes in all manner of communication. Our Constitutions and Customs and Guide so use it: "The Superior grants recreation (at meals) on the appointed day" (Chap. XXV, Art. 169) and "In addition to the evening recreation, the Local Superior may permit the Sisters to have recreation either from four to five in the afternoon in places where recreation is permitted or during the evening meal . . . except on recreation days where there is recreation throughout the meal" (Customs and Guide, Chaps. 32 and 33, pp. 201-211). Although herein the times when recreation is "a duty" and when it is "not a duty" are explicitly stated, nevertheless this broad use of the term has led to considerable confusion and guilt.

We would like to propose that the use of the word recreation be limited to an authentic communal activity. Such an activity might well flow from the character of the Mass. Because every Mass involves a longing for salvation and happiness, it is festive. Anything festive implies expectation and liberation from routine; the community recreation is ready to receive the fruits of the Mass. Just as the Sabbath day combines worship and rest, so the Mass (worship) and recreation (freedom from routine) belong together. This concept makes of recreation a sacramental. Play resulting from such a sacramental is a deeply religious expression of joy and freedom in which

for the moment, one "makes fun" of work in the sight of God and man. Just as Christ is present in the actual liturgical assembly gathered in His name at the Mass, so too, the coming together of the community is a condition for His presence at recreation. Where community happens, Christ happens.

Thus we may say: recreation is communal, active, and meaningful; it is sacramental; and it is liberal. By this latter we imply that, because of its disinterested nature, it is a prelude to aesthetic activity. Such a balance between the more vigorous work routines and the less strenuous creative activities makes a recreational environment compatible with the values of God, of the Church, and of society for women.

Mother McAuley's presence at the community recreation guaranteed that it would be a delightful blend of gaiety and reserve--of old fashioned non-sense and good manners. From her letters we derive these four adjectives as characteristic of recreation: gay, spontaneous, feminine, and simple.

When we collect all these adjectives: communal, festive, balanced, refined, spontaneous, simple, "fun-oriented," we can clearly see that it is limited in its relevance to a specific kind of situation; therefore, we are prepared in a few minutes to recommend some further changes in the proposals as now stated.

First, however, let us proceed to examine the term silence.

In early times silence was referred to as a pulchra caeremonia, a delightful amenity; later it became a sanctissima lex, a sacred law. This evolution from a spontaneous holy act to an arduous obligation may account for its frequent violation. It may also account for the continual repetition of "breaking silence" as an accusation at chapter, and for its rejection by a younger generation of Sisters who will not pretend an interior silence which is not actually experienced interiorly.

We must, therefore find some way to internalize as well as externalize silence, because all enduring traditions in ethical theory, philosophy of man, and spiritual theology affirm the need for the conditions under which man may absorb central truths, regulate his life, and integrate his love in order to effect unity in his life and then to order his actions so that they will proceed from this unity. Among these conditions are time and silence. Such a statement conclusively says that times of silence are indispensable to an authentic human life. How much more than does it contribute to a religious life--even more to community life.

Between silence and recreation, there seems to be only one evident relationship: both are potential means to and expression of charity. Beyond this point, all similarity seems to cease. In fact, the existence of one seems to negate the presence of the other.

On the other hand, silence and speaking are complementary constituents of a truly religious life. Silence can be a condition of speaking and vice versa; that is, each can make a person capable of the other. Both are necessary for growth in the Christian life. The Gospels are filled with examples demonstrating that Christ combined silence and speech (Matt. 4:1-11,

Mercy Generalate
Bethesda, Maryland

silence; Matt. 4:23-25, speech; Matt. 6:5-7, silence; Matt. 10:26-27, silence and speech; Mark 6:45-48, silence.

In his Progress Through Mental Prayer, Father Leen say: "Silence is a discipline undertaken in order to use the faculty of speech in such a way as shall profit and not prove harmful to the soul. It is only by silence that the use of the tongue is brought into order and made to subserve the purpose for which it was given to us by God."

Mother McAuley considered silence so important to religious reserve that she meditated on it daily. She shared with the Sisters her understanding of the true dialogue of the People of God which issues from those who are present to one another through a reciprocal participation in the Holy Eucharist--this is a wordless dialogue born of reflection, prayer, sacrifice, social charity, and justice. However, "there are times," said our foundress, "when you must be willing to interrupt the solace and sweetness of silence to receive your Lord in the person of one who comes knocking at your door--no matter the day or the hour."

To summarize: recreation, silence, speaking--each has its place and time and manner. We recreate in a community of "fun." We speak whenever and wherever we need to encounter each other in behalf of charity and courtesy--at meals, in the corridor, in the school, on the streets, etc. We remain silent to listen to God and to the people of God and to generate new reservoirs of spiritual and apostolic energy.

Prepared by Mother Mary Justine Sabourin, R.S.M.
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