



THE HEART OF THE HALL



The student publication for the Office of Mission and Ministry

Editor's Note

“He who was seated on the throne said, ‘I am making everything new!’” (Revelation 21:5 NIV).

The word “new” is most applicable to our lives around this time of the year. Whether it is used to describe the start of the New Year, a list of resolutions we wish to make in our daily routines, or a change within ourselves, newness is at the forefront of every person’s mind.

“The Heart of the Hall” is no different than those who use this time of the year to begin again or as it is written in the Bible, “be born again” (John 3:7). Rather, we have taken the time to make changes within our publication and our own perspectives of the Catholic faith.

If you are an avid reader of our publication, you may notice the first change our team chose to make in lieu of these new beginnings: a newly-designed cover page! Although the publication could never have become what it is without the beautiful work of Kiersten Lynch, a founding member of “The Heart of the Hall,” we decided to kickstart the Winter Edition with a fresh look for the front page.

Not only has the design been affected by our efforts to seek out the new, but our content for this edition is centered around different ways to think about life and faith. Jessica Kelly adds a twist to the popular phrase, “New Year, New Me,” by considering how God remains the same despite the changes in our lives. Additionally, she emphasizes the importance of letting go of the past and moving forward in a race she likes to call “the race of life.”

Emma Newgarden, the Editor-in-Chief of

Content for “The Heart of the Hall,” follows Kelly with her thoughts on charity. Specifically, Newgarden revisits the same saying, “New Year, New Me” and the correlation between transformation and service. When reading her article, you may find yourself reflecting on all those hours spent in U-Life community service as something that helped you become closer to God rather than a useless requirement.

Next, Sarah Adam contemplates the “why” behind prayer and the “how” we can pray to further develop our relationship with God. Questions such as, “Why should I talk to God about my day if He already knows everything about it?” and “Are we praying from a place of pride or do we approach God with a humble heart?” are proposed by Adam to explain the meaning of prayer that is not often taught to Catholics.

Christina Murphy explores a different aspect of our lives that needs change—the way we use social media and free will. Murphy’s close reading of the Catechism and other religious writings allows her to unpack the purpose of free will and how it can reduce media-related anxieties.

Lastly, Andrew Echevarria redefines what leisure means by detailing the difference between time that is filled with distractions and time that brings us closer to the right path of life. His experience with Exodus 90, a ninety-day religious exercise for Catholic men, is included in his article to provide first-hand advice on how to turn your time in leisure into time well-spent.

New beginnings are essential to the teachings of Catholicism, but are not

solely related to those who practice the faith. Every individual can take away value in the newness of life no matter which religion they choose to practice. We hope that the entire Seton Hall community can find this edition of “The Heart of the Hall” to be just as inspiring as it was to create. As we made “everything new” (Revelation 21:5 NIV) in our publication, we look forward to hearing the ways you changed your lives and your faith for the better.

Sincerely,

Bridgette Favale
Editor-in-Chief of Layout



Contents

3 **New Year, Same God**
Jessica Kelly

5 **Serving With Charity**
Emma Newgarden

7 **Choose to Open the Door**
Sarah Adam

9 **Free Will in the Age of Social Media**
Christina Murphy

11 **Why YOU Need Leisure Right Now**
Andrew Echevarria

Thank you to all the individuals who made this publication possible, including Fr. Colin Kay, Msgr. Dennis Mahon, Dean Traflet, & Fr. Douglas Milewski

NEW YEAR, SAME GOD



BY JESSICA KELLY

It was the first Sunday of the New Year and I found myself sitting in my usual seat at church, awaiting another message from God's word. As my pastor opened his Bible, he asked all of us to follow along in our own. We turned to Philippians 3:14, and he read, "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." He urged every individual in service that morning to apply this verse to their own lives, as we run this race of life.

I think we can all concur that 2020 was a rough year all around. It had ups, and certainly innumerable downs, but the consensus of society was that they were ready to be rid of this awful past year. 2020 was a time filled with strife, hatred, and a noticeable divide in our nation. Nobody could seem to agree on anything, a pandemic spread nationwide, everyone was trapped in their homes for months on end, and there seemed to be no light

at the end of the tunnel. Individuals fell into depression, experienced anxiety they may have never felt before, and feared the unknown and unpredictable future. As we move into the year 2021, however, it is vital that we do not hold on to this past time. 365 days have come and gone, and it is time to move forward. In order to progress ahead and receive God's blessings for our lives, we simply cannot hold on to the grudges, anger, and sadness that came with the year 2020.

Philippians 3:14 is a verse that we should carry with us into the year 2021. Each and every single one of us is running a race, the race of life. What we do with our lives, and how we live for God, is our choice. In order to receive God's blessings for us, we must run forward, towards the

prize, and away from the past. We must keep our eyes on the prize and run towards the finish line. If we continuously look back, we will stumble, fall, and lose the race; we will miss out on everything that God has in store for us in the future.

We can compare this Bible verse to a physical race, or any competition for that matter. During a race, it is vital to keep pushing onward. If athletes were to look behind them, dwell on their mistakes during the competition, or remember a time that they had failed in the past, it could prevent them from winning the new competition they are taking part in.

Similarly, if we as Christians continue to member and dwell on the misgivings

of 2020, our own past mistakes, or the trials we experienced personally, we cannot win our race in 2021. In order for God to continue to work in our lives, we have to let go of the past and press on. We have to do His work, share His gospel, live with kindness and love, and do our best to serve Him and others.

There are a few things that I do personally to continue to run the race of life. Beginning spiritually, I try to do my best to attend church services regularly, tell others about Jesus Christ, read my Bible, and pray. This year I also started teaching a Sunday school class, something that is a huge blessing to me. As I teach my students each week, I realize that there is still so much that I can learn from our Bible stories as well.

Additionally, writing for "The Heart of the Hall" and running our social media platforms has been an uplifting part of my life this past year. I hope that others learn about God and faith through these resources and our amazing team. In order to run the race of life, we have to follow God's will for us and do our best to serve Him first and others. When we are following his plan for our life, or our race, and not our own, we will be blessed more than we could imagine.

Aside from this, I run the race of life by doing my best to set goals, stay positive, and run forward instead of looking behind me. There are some things from the past that I cannot change, and I just have to accept that and move forward. If I let those mistakes, misgivings, or failures stick with me, I can never move on and discover what great things life has in store.

When I continue to hold on to those grudges, when I think of the people who have hurt me or whom I have hurt, I cannot run my race successfully. I try my best to stay positive and optimistic for what lies ahead. I have goals and plans for my life that I work towards and look forward to. These are just a few of the things that help me run my race of life;

now it is time for you to think of what can help you run yours. As we dive into a new year, it is of utmost importance to remember that God never changes. The phrase "new year, new me" can be seen trending on social media, as individuals resolve to change themselves at the start of each new year.

God, however, is always the same. He is omnipotent, meaning all powerful, omniscient, meaning all knowing, and omnipresent, meaning everywhere at the same time. God never changes; He will always be all powerful, knowing, and present. He stays with us even when the clock strikes 12:00 at the beginning of a new year.

No matter what happened in 2020, or what 2021 holds in store for us, it is comforting to know that God is continually in control, and he knows what is best for every one of us. If we allow Him to, He can do great things in our lives every year. We must trust in His will and plan, leave the past in the past, and look optimistically towards the future.

In this new year, let us shed the hatred and fear that consumed so many in 2020. Let us love one another, forgive each other, be kind, respectful, and move on. We cannot continue to look back at our past mistakes and dwell in a time that is now passed. Each one of us needs to resolve to move on, continue running this beautiful race of life which God has blessed us with, and do our best to serve Him.

Let 2021 be a great year not because of what happens in the world or as a result of our actions, but because of what God does for us. All of those little blessings, like the sun rising, the fresh water that we have, and the homes that we live in that we might take for granted are truly gifts from God.

We should not ignore everything He constantly does for us. We must continue to run this race that we have been blessed with and continue to follow God's will

for our lives along the way. If we continue to look back and stumble, we can never win the prizes God has in store for us each new year.

"If we continue to look back and stumble, we can never win the prizes God has in store for us each new year."

Serving With Charity

BY EMMA NEWGARDEN



“New Year, new me.” So the saying goes, presenting the start of each new year as an opportunity for self-transformation. For 2021, many of us set ourselves lofty goals with just that aim. To transform our bodies, we resolve to eat more greens and workout every day. To transform our minds, we plan to read more books and set aside study time. The idea is that by consistent repetition, these activities will over time become ingrained habits, so much a part of our lifestyle that we actually look forward to the reading and exercise that we started by forcing ourselves to complete.

For me, the annual theme of new years’ “transformation” always brings to mind the core Journey course and the U-Life class we all took as first-semester freshmen. In U-Life, we are required to complete 10 hours of Christian service,

as part of our introduction to the Seton Hall educational experience. I remember grumbling about the requirement, wondering what the big deal was and how service was supposed to be “transformative.”

So, what is the big deal? Why is community service such an important “Hall-mark?” On the one hand, the answer is obvious: we are a Catholic institution. The Church’s legacy of service is unparalleled from the ancient world onward. Paganism offered little incentive for human beings to help one another in the face of natural disaster, epidemic, and other crises – their gods desired only sacrifices to themselves.

Meanwhile, the early Church quickly developed such a reputation for philanthropy that the Roman emperor

Julian felt threatened, fearing a Christian-run miniature welfare state that would undermine his authority.

This unique Christian call to serve has to do with the theological virtue of charity. In a secular context, most people associate this term with monetary donations. While this definition makes sense, considering that if you follow Jesus’ teachings you try to help those in need, charity in the Christian sense has always entailed more than almsgiving. The English word comes from Latin *caritas*, comparable to the Greek *agapē*. The term *caritas* describes a love for God which loves all else in Him.

By this definition, Christians understand charity as the virtue which connects our love for God with love for others. Thus, the reason we are supposed to serve is

not because God arbitrarily commands us to, but because, if we really love Him, we already have that desire within our own hearts. Love of God and love of neighbor are integral, impossible to separate.

This is not to say that serving others comes easily for Christians. We've all complained before that being required to volunteer defeats the purpose. This is because we are assuming that charity is a purely altruistic endeavor, one that belongs to the realm of saints, or at any rate, people much holier than we are. People like Mother Teresa, who willingly give up their time, wealth, and energy to serve others must have some anomalous selflessness that the "average" person just doesn't naturally possess.

Of course it is true that Mother Teresa, now recognized as St. Teresa of Calcutta, is known as a model of charity. But given that we are ALL called to be saints, her example should encourage, not intimidate us. In [The Rise of Christianity](#), anthropologist Rodney Stark points out, "To call Mother Teresa an altruist and thus classify her behavior as nonrational is to deny the finest of human capacities, our ability to love."

"But given that we are ALL called to be saints, her example should encourage, not intimidate us."

Her charity did not stem from some perversity that caused her to seek out costs and eschew rewards; she served out of love for Jesus Christ, whose face she saw in each of the poor she served. In love that is charity, you genuinely WANT to serve those in need, such that the act is its own reward.

But here again lies the rub – what if we don't find service rewarding? So often we panic and shy away from the attempt just because we've not yet reached that point, not realizing that we can get there the same way Mother Teresa did – by practicing. Virtues are good habits. We can literally "practice" charity until it actually does come naturally, and of course when something comes naturally we will tend to enjoy doing it. What you freely choose to do over and over becomes part of your character, whether that's working out, eating healthy, or performing acts of service.

Looking back now at my U-Life woes, I've realized that just because Seton Hall tells us to serve does not make the act any less our free choice. After all, it would be just as easy to forge the hours on your U-Life log sheet as to check off a daily workout you actually skipped. However, if you are already in the habit of working out, to the point where you enjoy it as a hobby, chances are you wouldn't be tempted to skip it in the first place. Forming a habit takes repetition, and how can we expect to transform our hearts unless we put the same discipline into exercising our wills which we would into exercising our bodies?

Being required to "get your hours in", even (and perhaps especially) when we don't particularly feel like it, gives us the opportunity to practice choosing charity. Eventually, with enough practice, we may become charitable people, for whom service is a source of joy. At that point, our wills may align with God's, so that we will want to go out and serve because it makes us genuinely happy.

charity. Seton Hall's DOVE program offers a multitude of service opportunities to get started, including virtual outreach for COVID precaution. Of course, service doesn't need to be organized to be charitable. It could just be a regular effort to help your mom around the house, or to take time calling or visiting a lonely neighbor. The point is in the consistent, intentional self-giving that makes it a transformative act of love.

God does not demand perfection. He knows better than anyone our human limitations. Growing in virtue, like growing in fitness or in scholarship, is going to take sacrifice. But that's the beauty of virtue and of charity; by serving others, we grow in real love for God, and the more we love God the easier it becomes to serve, because we cannot help but grow in love for others at the same time. The relationship is reciprocal. There's nowhere to go but up!

This year, make a resolution to cultivate

CHOOSE TO OPEN THE DOOR

BY SARAH ADAM

"I knew that this is where God was calling me," concluded the speaker on the Campus Ministry Fall retreat I attended last semester. She went on to explain that from her time spent in prayer, she recognized where God was leading her. I was struck by the way she spoke about prayer; I could tell how important it was to her personal relationship with God. For me, prayer was not much more than repeating a list of intentions before I went to sleep at night and reciting lines at Mass.

Now, however, I was motivated by the excitement of the speaker and my fellow retreat attendees to learn about personal prayer. Unsure of where to begin, I reached out to friends from Campus Ministry and the missionaries on campus. I joined a Bible Study this year, and once again, the idea of a prayer life came up. I could not help but feel that there was a reason for it. Was God pushing me to take this next step and dig deeper into my faith through prayer?

Throughout my twelve years of Catholic elementary and high school, I had learned that we pray to ask for the intercession of God, Mary, and the Saints. We also offer intentions and the Glory Be. Jesus Himself is the one

who showed us the importance of structured prayer. When His disciples asked Jesus how they should pray, He replied, "When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation" (Luke 11:2-4). Although I knew that I was following Jesus's example to pray to our Heavenly Father, I never thought about why I was praying these prayers. As Catholics, it is important for us to discover why we pray and how we can become closer to God through prayer.

Discovering the meaning of prayer begins with recognizing that prayer consists of both speaking to God, but more importantly, listening. Prayer is how we communicate with the Lord; it is a constant relationship. In any relationship that we have with a family member or friend, we do not just speak at them; we take the time to be present and listen to them. We should take time to speak and listen to God throughout our day, just as we would stop to catch up with a friend.

The first time I tried this, I was a bit hesitant; I asked myself, "Why should I



talk to God about my day if He already knows everything about it?" But sure enough, taking that moment to stop and think about my day and invite God in brought a calm over me. Even though He knows everything about me and my life, He still desires to have a personal relationship with me. It is up to me, however, to make the choice each day to pursue this relationship.

God is constantly speaking to us, but all too often we are too busy to take the time and listen. God can speak to us through people, experiences, and interactions. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) defines prayer as communion, a covenant, and God's gift to us. The realization that God desires a living relationship with us explains the first part of The Catechism's definition: communion (CCC 2558).

When we pray to God and work on developing our prayer life, we are taking the time to be in the presence of our loving Father. When we speak to God and focus our attention on Him, we are truly united with Him. The Catechism explains that "prayer is the living relationship of the children of God with their Father who is good beyond measure, with his Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit" (CCC 2565).

I was amazed when I took the time to think about this concept; God welcomes us into His presence and since our Baptism, we have been in communion with Him. This is something so beautiful that we cannot fathom. When I take the time to pray each day and talk to God, I have formed a habit of acknowledging that I am truly in His presence. This can be hard to do at times, but it is important to appreciate what a blessing this is.

What amazes me even more is that despite our sins and brokenness, God still desires a deeper relationship with us, His children. He gave us prayer to further this relationship and call us back to Him. God desires communion with you and me so much that He died on the cross to

make this possible. Despite our flaws and the mistakes we continuously make, God still reaches His hand out to us. Even while we were sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:6-8).

Furthermore, prayer is an illustration of God's covenant: an unconditional promise made by the Lord to humanity. Throughout the Old Testament, we see many covenants that God made with His children such as Abraham. Although Abraham was about 100 years old, God promised him and his wife Sarah a son and to bless them with as many descendants as there are stars in the sky (Genesis 26:4).

However, the relationship that comes from covenant cannot be just one-sided. As the Catechism explains, it is the action of God and of man (CCC 2564). Every day, a choice is made; God continually chooses us, and His Spirit can fathom the human heart and know it fully. But now, we must also choose to acknowledge this covenant in our hearts and bring God in. Putting in this effort each day lays a foundation for a prayer life with God.

This can be very difficult at times; humans are not perfect, and we can sometimes doubt whether we can trust God's plan. Even Abraham doubted God's ability to bring him a son at such an old age and tried to control what he could not. Sure enough, God provided for Abraham, and He will for us too. Abraham's story illustrates that God works through everyone, even those who are broken and doubt Him.

Finally, prayer is God's sacred gift to humanity, which calls us to raise our hearts and minds to make our requests known to Him. However, prayer is not a gift that calls us to gloat nor one that we should take for granted. It is important to ask ourselves: are we praying from a place of pride or do we approach God with a humble heart?

Matthew 23:12 explains that "whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and

whoever humbles himself will be exalted." When I began incorporating daily prayer into my life, I quickly realized that I had and still have a lot to learn. I have truly seen that humility is the foundation of prayer (CCC 2559) and that God does not expect me to be perfect and He is patient. I am truly blessed to develop this relationship with God. Prayer is not all about me, rather, about my relationship with the One who died for me and desires to know me.

At this point you might be asking yourself: "Now that I know more about prayer, well, where do I start? What am even I supposed to say to God?" I found myself feeling this way when I began my personal prayer. Start by taking a deep breath and thanking God for what He has blessed you with. Developing a prayer life takes time, but also dedication and intentionality. I suggest setting aside a certain time each day, a place, choosing what type of prayer you will pray, but most importantly, identifying why are you praying. Prayer is not all about finding answers or hoping to get what you want. To make yourself available to God and to desire a personal relationship with Him is so much more valuable.

I also encourage you to incorporate reading the Bible into your prayer routine. The Bible App and the Bible in a Year podcast with Father Mike Schmitz are two incredible modern resources to incorporate scripture into your daily life. Over time, you will see that God speaks to us throughout Scripture and that He is present everywhere. My prayer life is far from perfect, but it has certainly grown throughout the past few months.

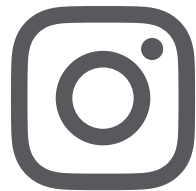
When I set time aside in the day (specifically the morning) for prayer, I find my day starts on a positive note and I that I am more joyful. Now, I look forward to time spent in prayer and reading Scripture, something I thought was difficult to do in the past. God continually seeks me and you; His love for us is more than we could ever imagine. Now it's your turn; will you open the door and let Him in?

FREE WILL IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

BY CHRISTINA MURPHY

You may recognize this scenario – you pick up your phone to check your school email, but upon opening up the search engine, an overwhelming list of flashy headlines appears on the screen. Or you may message a friend on your social media only to find yourself scrolling through countless posts, feeling more stressed than entertained.

I first began to experience the effects of information overload during quarantine when I began to develop habits of randomly browsing on the internet, reading online news daily, and looking at social media. As a result, my increased technology usage, paired with troubling news about COVID-19 and current events, often left me feeling anxious and spent. I was acutely aware of all the turmoil happening, yet I felt that there was nothing I could do to solve the problems I was reading about.



In the midst of my media-related anxiety, it was easy for me to believe that my peace of mind would return if I were able to change my situation by molding the world to my desires or altering the things that bothered me.

However, this was not the conclusion that I came to. I slowly realized that sometimes the one thing I could control was how I chose to react to the situation. This could only be achieved by exercising my faith and choosing to entrust God with my troubles. By intentionally choosing to surrender my stress to God, it was easier for me to let go of my anxiety.

The worry we feel from the news and media is not trivial to God. His grace is ready and available to help us with anxiety, information overload, or other such modern worries. God has done this by gifting all people with free will. It is natural to have fearful, knee-jerk reactions in response to current events. The opposite of this fear is trust and faith – coming to God in prayer and trusting that He will guide our judgement.

The Holy Spirit is accompanied by gifts such as wisdom and understanding, key elements in discerning between good and evil or truth and lies. With this guidance, we can then tackle the myriad of information being thrown at us. By asking God to help us form our free will and by being open to His guidance, students at Seton Hall will gain discernment and peace of mind when consuming social media and news.

In order to apply this Catholic doctrine to everyday life, the Seton Hall community needs to know what it is and why it is an important concept to understand. Free will is one of the basic attributes of the human person, intellect another. The Catholic Church states that free will is innate to human nature, regardless of religion or upbringing. This stems from the reality that all people are created in God's image.



As The Catechism of the Catholic Church states “Man is rational and therefore like God; he is created with free will and is master over his acts” (CCC 1730). Since humans are created in God’s image, they will naturally have an intellect and free will like He does. While the human will is barely as complex or profound as God’s, people can discern between good and evil and make moral choices without coercion.

Furthermore, free will is a human power that neither animals nor any other created life form possesses. It connects humans with God in a profound way, for only through free will can someone choose God and form a bond of love with Him. To this point, the Catholic Church asserts that free will is, “an inalienable requirement of the dignity of the human person” (CCC 1738). Free will enables human beings not only to choose for themselves, but also to choose God, the greatest source of happiness and purpose.

Many Catholic students may not consider using their free will in times of duress because of the common misunderstanding of free will as the ability to do whatever we want. If this were truly the case, it would mean that we become powerless whenever circumstances restrict our range of potential actions. However, free will as Catholicism understands it is not simple autonomy, but the ability to recognize and choose the good that is God. It is directed towards someone higher than us as individuals or our immediate desires.

Engaging with social media and the news requires the judicious use of our free will. Especially since quarantine, many of us have become immersed in media, obsessively checking COVID-19 statistics or the latest news of political upheaval. Young people have grown up with devices which constantly expose us to media, causing anxiety from information overload and the inability to recognize false information.

According to a 2017 study by Sprout

Social, eighty-six percent of people want social media brands to be honest above any other trait (“Brand Personality: The More Authentic, The More Effective”). It is probable that this statistic has stayed the same or even increased during quarantine. This combination of confusion and apprehension can aptly be named “media-related anxiety.”

A common way people seek respite from media-related anxiety is avoidance, such as not watching the news. While a media detox can be healthy, we cannot realistically check out from the outside world. There must be a solution in which people can maintain internal calm while also actively engaging with reality. After all, how can Setonians be the “salt of the Earth” and the “light of the world” (Matthew 5:13-14) if they are not present in society? Our use of free will rather than permanent avoidance is the foundation for a long-term solution for media-related anxiety.

If media-related anxiety removes a sense of control, then free will helps regain it. Although I learned that I could not always regulate outside events, I was able to utilize my free will in response. Catholics can take heart in the fact that free will is one of humanity’s most powerful gifts. It is independent from any other external force or influence, whether it be Facebook or the news on television.

However, to use free will most effectively, it must be directed towards something, or most properly someone. That someone is God, who is the true object of free will. Instead of letting worry wash over us, we can purposefully turn to God and ask for help. Choosing to invite the influence of God and the Holy Spirit is one of the best ways to utilize free will during media-related anxiety.

Young people must understand that choosing to invite God into the worry is not an ineffective or passive response to the problem. In fact, the Catechism assures the faithful that, “Christian experience attests ... the more docile

we are to the promptings of grace, the more we grow in inner freedom and confidence during trials, such as those we face in the pressures and constraints of the outer world” (CCC 1742). Many of us can relate to feeling the “pressures and constraints of the outer world” brought on by social media, news, and current events.

The Catechism clearly states that people will become more equipped to face such troubles if they direct their free wills to the “promptings of grace” given by God and the Holy Spirit. By doing so, we can better discern what information we consume, how much we consume, and how it affects us. God will free us from media-related anxieties, since directing the free will towards God is, “a force for growth and maturity in truth and goodness” (CCC 1731).

Maturity of judgement and greater recognition of truth and goodness are important skills when consuming social media and news in the modern age, particularly for the next generation. Since they will be the ones creating media and reporting news, a focus on truth and discernment is key.

There are many other ways in which students at Seton Hall can address media-related anxiety, such as prayer, fellowship, or quiet time away from technology. Yet, free will is the underlying determinant to dealing with any kind of stress in life. It can be used to combat media-related anxieties with right judgement, discernment, and a clear mindset.

As the faithful, we must choose to direct our wills towards God. However, as flawed human beings, we need God to guide us. It is openness to His guidance which will allow the faithful at Seton Hall to utilize their free will in positive ways and not let the world affect them. As Philippians 4:7 promises, “The peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Jesus Christ”.



Why YOU Need Leisure Right Now

BY ANDREW ECHEVARRIA

I found myself lost in the woods towards the end of 2020, metaphorically speaking. I took time and investigated what my year consisted of in the midst of the chaos which had unfolded. I lacked a number of disciplines in my life which led me to fall spiritually astray. The need for order, routine, and tradition overcame me as I desired to get back on the right path.

For this reason, I decided to embark on Exodus 90: a rigorous, spiritual, transformative expedition for Catholic men. I will spare the details, but some things sacrificed during those days are media (such as YouTube, and Netflix), snacks, alcohol, video games, and more, while intense prayer, rigorous exercise, and such are incorporated into our daily schedule. Since I could not do many of the activities that I normally enjoy during those 90 days, I realized that I needed to make proper use of my free time. I started to contemplate and write down a plan for incorporating good leisure time for the sake of my growth – both intellectual and spiritual.

Before I could come up with new habits of leisure, I wanted to identify the ones that were causing restlessness within me. Out of the many distractions I had in 2020, my worst was media: I spent countless wasteful hours on YouTube and scrolling through Twitter and other forms of social media. There is nothing wrong with the use of Instagram, Twitter, et cetera, but the overuse of such can be wasteful. I realized that looking at content that neither made me grow nor be of use to me, led to a decline in my spiritual life and productivity.

Instagram, for example, is purposefully designed to keep you scrolling on the app, which I would do many hours each week. I sought to change this habit; although it was not an easy start, I realized that in order to grow, I needed to do something uncomfortable. How could

I grow as a person if I simply stayed in my own comfort zone? For example, if I wanted to lose a significant amount of weight and get out of my habits of sitting on the couch all day, I would have to do the uncomfortable and stop being lazy, get up, and start moving in order to achieve those goals. In my specific situation, if I wanted to stop consuming wasteful hours on media, I needed to set boundaries (which can be uncomfortable) and refrain from my old habits.

Upon sacrificing this, I found myself with a lot of free time initially. Many college students find themselves in a similar situation; after conversing with others, I noticed that they were just as wasteful and unproductive in their free time. I realized that an excessive amount of free time often leads to depression, 11

loneliness, and isolation. I found myself in that category too, but thankfully a few of my thoughts – gathered with the help of some of my classes, literature and experience – helped me overcome those sentiments.

To go about substituting good leisure for my social media addiction, I had to actually contemplate what exactly good leisure presupposes. One of the more important titles written on that topic in the twentieth century was Joseph Pieper’s Leisure: The Basis of Culture. He defines leisure as “the disposition of receptive understanding, of contemplative beholding, and immersion in the real.” Essentially, Pieper argues that leisure is a certain understanding of the mind and a condition of the soul that stimulates a capacity to perceive the reality of the world. Using Pieper’s work and arguments, I will suggest how good leisure appears on the surface, but also the internal impact it can have.

Pieper writes, “leisure is a form of silence; of that silence which is a prerequisite of the apprehension of reality. Only the silent hear, and those who do not remain silent do not hear.” He begins by arguing that the first step towards leisure is silence in order to hear, not in a literal sense, but rather in a manner to perceive the world with our eyes and minds. This does not necessarily mean to cancel all kind of noise and to live life like a Carthusian Monk in pure silence. Rather, it suggests that this silence is for the soul’s power to answer to the reality of the world if left tranquil.

Leisure, in Pieper’s work, “is not a Sunday afternoon idle, but the preserve of freedom of education and of culture of that undiminished humanity which views the world as a whole.” This idea suggests a pulling away from the distractions of the real world. Leisure is thus not primarily found in a work setting or while doing a chore, but instead, a way to work on oneself for the sake of others during free time and to

orient ourselves to be strengthened for God and for neighbor. This is almost countercultural since leisure is usually thought of as only for the sake of one’s own pleasure. Pieper argues that the whole purpose of leisure is to grow in virtue – interiorly and exteriorly – as an act of worship of God and a purification of the self.

Leisure, when understood with Pieper’s definition, is the primary means to properly tackle Exodus 90 apart from one’s daily duties. The reason that some of my housemates and I decided to undertake Exodus 90 was driven by a shared desire to grow as men: men who take risks out in the world and are not weak when it comes to facing trials and temptations.

We aspire to be men who lay down their lives for their neighbors and men who die to themselves and pick up their cross to follow Christ every day. We strive to be men who desire to be “perfect as [our] heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt. 5:48). This would not be accomplished if I spent my leisure time slacking, for example, playing video games when I promised not to.

In my mind, I wanted to use leisure as a mechanism to build the ark that protects the world from the flood. The world is dangerous and polluted, often filled with hatred, anger, distractions and opposition; but in St. Paul’s words, my intention for all is to “set [our] minds on the things that are above, not on the things that are on earth” (Col. 3:2).

I created a list of different leisure activities that would assist me to both relax and grow in worship of God and for neighbor. This list differs from the conventional “go out and exercise” or “journal every day” that people typically plan to do regardless.

I settled on five directives for leisure that have greatly impacted me over the last few months:

“I SETTLED ON FIVE DIRECTIVES FOR LEISURE THAT HAVE GREATLY IMPACTED ME OVER THE LAST FEW MONTHS:”

- Read – Reading is what I do for most of my day. It’s a dominant part of what I do for my majors. For 2021, my goal is to read an average of one book a week (which is going rather successfully thus far). The disciplines that come with Exodus 90 are only going to make this all the more possible.

But besides reading for class, I personally like to read literature that 1) helps me escape from reality, 2) increases my intellectual knowledge, 3) are academic-based reads on various subjects, and 4) helps me grow spiritually.

My top recommendations for reads that become a portal for an exterior world are J.R.R. Tolkien’s The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings, the short stories of Flannery O’Connor, Crime and Punishment by Fyodor Dostoevsky, and more.

Some of the best work for self-improvement and growth are The Power of Habit by Charles Duhigg, 12 Rules for Life by Jordan Peterson, and Talking to Strangers by Malcolm Gladwell.

For fun and intellectual growth, I genuinely enjoy reading the Summa Theologiae by Thomas Aquinas, How to Win Friends and Influence People by Dale Carnegie, and The Sky of Our Manufacture by Jesse Oak Taylor.

The spiritual reads that have renewed my spiritual life include works by C.S. Lewis – specifically Mere Christianity and The Screwtape Letters – along with the

Confessions of St. Augustine, and Saint John Paul the Great: His Five Loves by Jason Evert. The list goes on longer than I could write – granted, these are my personal favorites for the moment.

- Learn a New Activity or Further Develop One – This could range from learning or further developing guitar skills, chess strategies, drawing, writing, memorizing scripture verses and more. This is personal preference, but in general, something that relaxes the mind away from work but also is productive.
- Spend Intentional Time with People – We are made for love, communion, and for each other. The only way we can flourish in our human natures is to properly celebrate Feats in community.
- Sleep – Having sufficient amount of sleep per night sets one up for success the next day. Many complications disappear because of such. I encourage you to go to bed and wake up at the same time daily.
- Pray – There are many forms of prayer, and the Church offers a beautiful and Holy spiritual buffet. Adore the marvels of the Lord in your life and outside.

One of the strongest ways to grow in the basis of our culture is by indulging ourselves with proper leisure. True leisure is not about taking a few breaks throughout the day to play video games or binge watch shows on Netflix. Rather, the way we can break open this world of distractions is if we genuinely go deep and consider the profound things of the world and the marvels of God.

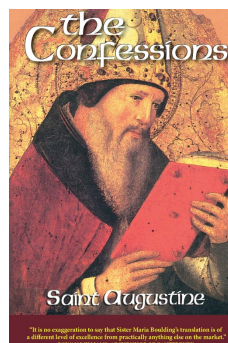
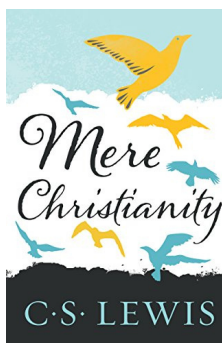
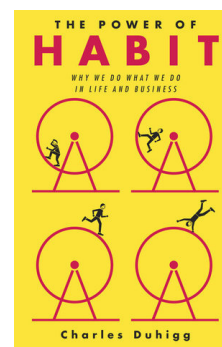
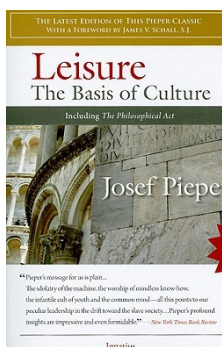
I am not saying we should all do Exodus 90 (or Fiat 90 for women), but we all should decide what to do with the precious time given to us. My encouragement is to use leisure wisely so that we can stay on the right path of life .

Our Author Asks:

"What new ways are you going to spend time in leisure?"

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The Heart of the Hall gathers a unique and driven group of student writers.

Along with our writers below, "The Heart of the Hall" would like to recognize the copy editors of this edition: **Matthew Forget, Ellen Mangan, and Isabel Condon.**



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