

I remember well being called by Bishop Boland – and then being sent by him to be a pastor for the first time at St. Patrick’s in St. Joseph and St. Joseph’s in Easton back in 1996.

As you *may* imagine, being a pastor of two parishes has a few challenges – for one thing, you have twice the administrative work – two parish councils, two finance councils, two groups of staff to work with, two different religious education & RCIA programs, --- two different communities who have their own unique joys and sorrows, triumphs and challenges – characters, budgets, and calendars.

St. Patrick’s also had a school, which had been struggling with falling enrollment for years – which meant, of course, struggling finances --- but somehow we managed to keep it open from year to year. My most difficult struggle in that first pastorate though -- came in a very unexpected way. You see I was following a pastor who rather prided himself on never taking any time off. So that when I came along and took a regular day off – everyone wondered why I did it – since my predecessor never did.

And oh my gosh – when I took a vacation – why everyone thought I was a sluggard – since my predecessor had never taken a vacation in the whole six years he was there! There was, however, a great difference though between me and my predecessor – that I don’t really know if anyone noticed but me – because no one ever acknowledged it. You see, like clockwork – every six months or so – my predecessor -- would end up in the hospital for a week or two. Me? I was there for a whole 8 years and never spent one day in the hospital – nor one day in bed sick.

Oh, even when my predecessor had moved on, people continued to feel so sorry for him because he worked so hard. Me? They just complained about, because I took time off. . .

And when we buried my predecessor long before he turned 55 – everyone just said he worked himself to death. . .

Another friend often bragged how he never took any time off the first two years he was ordained – there was just too much to do! But I noticed after he left in his 3rd year – he took frequent vacations with his wife and children.

My doctor, who I have a great respect for because he is a very caring individual – is fond of telling me, and I assume his other patients – “take care of stress in your life – or stress will take care of you.”

I think Jesus knew this long before my doctor did. As we heard last week, he had sent the disciples out to do some very important work: cast out demons, preach repentance of sins, anoint the sick, and cure them. And I am sure most – like Bartholomew was telling us last week --- felt pretty unworthy, or untrained, or unqualified to do this ministry. But they went – because they were sent.

This week, we hear how they return and “reported all they had done and taught.” And Jesus says to them, “come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.” If one works hard, one should also play hard. . . Take care of stress in your life – or stress will take care of you. . . Good advice from the master physician, Jesus.

Since the end of slavery 150 years ago, and most especially after the beginning of the industrial revolution – all working people get time off from their jobs. No one works 24/7/365.

Most people work a 40 hour week – and have the weekends off: to rest, to spend time with friends and family, to do chores around the house; to garden, golf, read, fish, play poker, watch television – or however else they choose to recharge themselves.

And then most people receive additional holiday time off – how we love our three day weekends in the U.S.! Some, I’m sure, felt cheated this year with the 4th of July falling on a Saturday – and for many – no extra day off! And then most people also receive vacation time in addition to just having weekends and holidays, off.

Priests are no exception to having time off. Why, even religious priests, sisters and brothers get vacation time away from their communities.

Priests throughout the world – because it is part of the universal law of the Church found in Canon Law – get one day off a week (mine is Monday), 28 days of vacation a year, 7 days off for retreat, and another 7 days off a year to be used for continuing education.

You see, I think in her 2,000 years of wisdom, the Church knows much better than I –

-that a mind that isn’t constantly expanding through continuing education is a mind that will contract.

-and a soul that isn’t being renewed on a regular basis is one that will drift from the Lord.

-and a body that is not given the opportunity to rest and be renewed, will soon break down in some way.

Lest you think it sounds like I get a lot of time off, – let’s do some quick math – 52 (one day off a week) + 28 (days of vacation) + 7 (days for retreat) + 7 (of continuing education) = 94 days. . . so all the time I get off doesn’t even amount to the 104 days most working people get off every year just on weekends . And that’s not a complaint, it is just stating a fact.

I love what I do. And I want to keep on doing it. And I intend to do my best to take care of stress in my life, instead of it taking care of me --- by enjoying each and every one of those days off I am given as a benefit every year. And I encourage you to do the same.

We all need to heed the advice recently given by Pope Francis in his encyclical: *Laudatio Si (Praise be to you)* on the care of the environment.

The pope writes: “The acceptance of our bodies as God’s gift is vital for welcoming and accepting the entire world as a gift from the Father and our common home.

“Learning to accept our body, to care for it and to respect it is an essential element of any genuine human ecology.” (Par. 155)

“Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.” Have with listened to this advice from the master physician, Jesus Christ?