



Newsletter – September 2020

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Taking Care of Our Health – Faith and Rest

Introduction

At past sessions of Feast of St Joseph the Worker, we have been reminded that all humans (including workers) need to have a balanced life: work for 8 hours, rest (sleep) for 8 hours and recreation for 8 hours (recreation includes activities for spiritual growth). In Singapore it has been commented that workers spent long hours (more than 8 hours) working and that they are not getting enough rest. Thus, it is pertinent to have a look at this subject of work, rest and the teachings of the Catholic faith on these activities.

See

Let us take a look at the reality: it was reported that Singaporeans are sleep deprived. In a study known as 2019 Health and Fitness, consultant Fitbit Southeast Asia shared that Singaporeans have an average nightly sleep of 7 hours 5 minutes and that makes us the third most sleep deprived after Japanese and Indians (who get an average sleep of 6 hours 47 minutes and 7 hours 1 minute respectively).¹This is consistent with another study known as Philips' 2019 Sleep Study² which found that the main reasons keeping Singaporeans up at night are none other than worry and stress. A total of 61 per cent of Singaporean respondents attributed their sleeplessness to worry or stress, higher than the global average of 54 per cent. Around 35 per cent said their lack of sleep was caused by their sleeping environments

Case 1: When I was the head of a department in a large organization, I tried not send emails or messages to colleagues/members of my team after office hours, even if they are from the bosses. Of course this make me look slow and unresponsive in this modern working environment. Things became very different when I joined a start-up company. I get messages from the boss at night, and I have to respond

¹<https://www.mobihealthnews.com/news/asia-pacific/singapore-third-most-sleep-deprived-after-japan-and-india-fitbit-s-data-indicates>

²<https://www.businessinsider.sg/study-finds-singaporeans-are-among-the-worlds-worst-sleepers-and-yes-stress-is-whats-keeping-them-up-at-night>

otherwise the burden is on him to hold that idea or problem alone; so right up to 10pm or as early as 7am work correspondence is the norm. You don't want to be the bottleneck in the company who is unaware of a problem, holding up everyone else.

Case 2: A friend of mine is in sales. He responds to calls and messages almost 24 hours a day since he earns by commission. Sometimes his clients would call from overseas in a different time zone. Whilst he admit there is a legitimate reason to ignore the call, he choose not to so as build a better rapport with the clients.

Case 3: A junior college student has school work that includes project and school work and she does her work until about 12 midnight. Before she sleep, she spend some time trawling the internet to catch up with latest entertainment news and social media chat with friends, sleeping at about 1am. That's on a normal day (without rushing for project deadlines or studying for exams). She has to wake up at 5:30am to prepare for school, taking public transport; thus giving her about 4.5-5 hours of sleep "on a normal day".

As part of growing into a full-functioning human being, our parents tried to ensure we eat healthily, play safely and even get enough sleep when we were young. This could have been reinforced in school health education: that our body's immune system is optimal when we get enough sleep (balanced with right amount of nutrition, exercise and sunlight). Yet our culture now extols those who work long hours and sleep less. (In fact at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, again and again the medical community had to remind the public that our body's immune system needs proper balance of nutrition, exercise and sleep to be optimal.)

Sleep is so needed by us that our body relishes it; we find it enjoyable and often it is very difficult to get out of bed in the morning. So why do we continue staying awake at night?

Part of the reason is work: as seen in the above cases there is no clear demarcation of work and personal time and more so when once we have the mobile devices. Secondly, even when we finish work we spend time reading articles online or flipping through the channels on the TV or just staying up late because our thinking is "now I have some free time -it is my time for my own leisure. However the moment I go to sleep the next time I wake up will be tomorrow morning and it'll be time to work again." Other reasons can be that parents need to attend to the needs of their children such as going to school, domestic helpers in homes who have to wake up early to do the housework, etc.

We should be responsible to ourselves and family that we have to take care of our own health. Do we have to push back work when it is necessary? In terms of priority we know God, our family and only lastly to our boss (or clients); yet our behavior shows the other way round: because God is important but not urgent; our job is urgent (and perhaps we think it is important when we think it is necessary to keep our standard of living).

Judge

Personal Reflection

1. How much sleep are you getting and how much sleep are your children getting?
2. How much sleep should an adult/ child have?
3. If you have insufficient sleep: why?
4. Do you think you have to solve all the problems before you sleep?

Christian Reflection

Psalm 127 *“Unless the LORD builds the house
those who build it labor in vain.
Unless the LORD watches over the city,
the watchman stays awake in vain.
² It is in vain that you rise up early
and go late to rest,
eating the bread of anxious toil;
for he gives to his beloved sleep.”*

1. What does Psalm 127 say about work, rest and leisure?
2. What do the Gospels, encyclicals and the social teachings of the Catholic Church say about work, rest and leisure?

Act

As we go through this act of faith, so that we have a balanced life, we must also be aware we are in a position to bless anyone working for us (under our charge). We allow them rest and trust that God will guide the work/project through. This is of course provided there is reasonable resource and time planned for the project or work. If we are in leadership position we can work with an act of charity for our workers (ourselves included).

We then need to discern: are we too easy on ourselves or are we working in a healthy balanced way? For sloth and laziness itself is also a vice we must avoid. We need to pray and reflect, and give glory to God in all aspects of our life: work, rest and recreation to get the right balance.
