

FAITH MATTERS

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REDEEMING THE TIME

BY FR. PAUL SCALIA

SEE THEREFORE, BRETHREN,
HOW YOU WALK CIRCUMSPECTLY:
NOT AS UNWISE, BUT AS WISE:
REDEEMING THE TIME,
BECAUSE THE DAYS ARE EVIL.
(EPH 5:15-16)

“TIME TAKES NO HOLIDAY”

We might think this sober observation comes from someone today – perhaps an anxious businessman, a CEO, a politician. One of the most characteristic modern traits is obsession with time. We are forever trying to get hold of it, save it, and make it. We develop one timesaving device and tactic after another, and learn time-management – always trying to rope in that most precious commodity. But can not understand why we seem to have less of it than before.

Time takes no holiday. That’s Augustine of Hippo, 1600 years ago.

Our time obsession is nothing new. We feel it more keenly, perhaps, because our technology provides more opportunities to indulge it... or suffer from it. But chasing after time –

fretting about the future, ruing or longing for the past – this comes from the world’s fallen nature.

God created the world in time. He originally intended time as a gift: the necessary condition for man to subdue the earth, to be fruitful and multiply, to enjoy and to grow in communion with God. But because of sin we now experience time as a burden, a task, even a threat. Like the rest of the fallen world, time rebels against us. It eludes and overwhelms us. It brings about erosion, decay, and disintegration. And it has become also the occasion for the evil one to work his mischief. Therefore, Paul observes that *the days are evil*.

For that reason also he speaks about redeeming time: literally, *reclaiming* it. The brief phrase is filled with meaning. The entrance of God into time means that the passing of the hours, days, and years no longer brings just continuous disintegration and decay. Since Christ embraces all time, it can now be redeemed – reclaimed. Like the rest of creation, time is both wounded by sin and able to be reclaimed by us, the children of God.

Or rather, we participate in redeeming it, reclaiming it for Christ. This means not doing with time whatever we want – not for accumulating money, power, pleasures – but reclaiming it for God





and His glory. A pagan poet said, *Carpe diem – Seize the day!* But only the Christian can really do so – reclaiming time, taking it in hand, consecrating it to God.

With God entering time in the Person of Christ, the gift of time has been restored to us. It now affords us opportunity for repentance. Put starkly, there is still time for us to turn to Him. Saint Paul exhorts us in this as well: *Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.* (2 COR 6:2) We should use the time we have to turn away from sin.

And for more. Time is granted also for growth in grace. Why are these years, so much time allotted to us? Certainly, so that we can repent. But

also so that we can grow. So that the life of Christ planted in our souls at Baptism can be cultivated and nourished – so that it can grow and flourish *unto the measure of the age of the fullness of Christ.* (EPH 4:13)

How then – concretely – do we redeem time? First, as with all created goods, in order to realize its true value we must sacrifice it. We must give time over to the Lord – specifically in prayer. To say, “I’m too busy to pray” means that you are no longer redeeming time. Time, rather, has got you by the tail and will soon enfold you in its process of disintegration. Of course, the world thinks it a *waste* when we give time to prayer. Fine. Let’s go and waste time with the Lord who embraces all time.

Second, we redeem time by being attentive – responsive – to the duty of the moment. Saint Francis de Sales says, “Every moment comes to us pregnant with a command from God, only to pass on and plunge into eternity, there to remain forever what we have made it.” Every moment is an opportunity to serve the Lord – by prayer, work, silence, speaking, suffering.

This requires being ruthlessly practical in our scheduling. Why do we schedule many things – work, play, vacation, the doctor, dentist, mechanic, and so on – but we do not extend that same practical wisdom to our spiritual lives? Why do we not use that same practicality to harness time for eternity? Specifically, by scheduling prayer, spiritual reading, confession, etc.

This Catholic view of time does not mean merely keeping busy. The busiest people are typically enslaved to time, not masters of it. The proper question for discernment is, *Are you a man of action or a man of activity?* A man of action has seized time to reclaim it. A man of activity has been seized by time and is bounced from one event, task, commitment to the next. We need to set aside time to be “wasted” (IN THE WORLD’S ESTIMATION) by rest, prayer, recreation. Further, the break we need from busyness is not “vegging out” or “killing time.” It is the deliberate setting aside and using time for rest, as the Lord commanded us.

We are not merely to mark time but to redeem it. As Cardinal Manning once put it:

“NEXT TO GRACE
TIME IS THE MOST
PRECIOUS GIFT OF GOD.
YET HOW MUCH OF BOTH WE
WASTE. WE SAY THAT TIME
DOES MANY THINGS.
IT TEACHES US MANY LESSONS,
WEANS US FROM MANY FOLLIES,
STRENGTHENS US IN GOOD
RESOLVES, AND HEALS MANY
WOUNDS. AND YET IT DOES
NONE OF THESE THINGS.
TIME DOES NOTHING. BUT TIME IS
THE CONDITION OF ALL THESE
THINGS WHICH GOD DOES IN TIME.
TIME IS FULL OF
ETERNITY. AS WE USE IT SO
SHALL WE BE. EVERY DAY
HAS ITS OPPORTUNITIES,
EVERY HOUR ITS OFFER
OF GRACE.”



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