

HOMILY
Sunday, July 23, 2006

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I'll give you the consequences of the burden; you guess the cause...

- It afflicts 70 million Americans and is faulted for 38,000 deaths a year.
- Teenagers suffer from it. Studies show that 64 percent of teens blame it for poor school performance.
- Middle-agers face it. Researchers say the most severe cases occur between thirty and forty.
- Senior citizens are afflicted by it. One study suggests that the condition impacts 50 percent of the over-65 population.
- Treatments involve everything from mouth guards to herbal teas to medication

Any idea what is being described? Chemical abuse? Divorce? Long sermons? None of those answers are correct, though the last one was a good hunch. The answer may surprise you.

INSOMNIA! AMERICA CAN'T GET TO SLEEP!

Thirty tons of aspirin, sleeping pills and tranquilizers are consumed every day. The energy gauge on the dashboard of our foreheads says "***EMPTY!***"

Why are we so tired that we can't sleep? Have you read a newspaper lately? Heart attacks, betrayal, credit card debt, job insecurity, custody battles, murder in our own backyard, vandalism, and violence on TV. People before our time didn't have to face these things. We do, however, and they keep us awake.

Were we to invite an alien to solve our problem he'd suggest a simple solution—everybody go to sleep. We'd laugh at him. He doesn't understand the way we work. We work hard. We're always on the run. Sometimes we're so busy that we don't have time to even think of coming to Mass. There is money to be made...degrees to be earned...ladders to be climbed...places to go! In our book, busyness is next to Godliness.

We idolize Thomas Edison, who claimed he could live on fifteen-minute naps. Somehow, we forget to mention Albert Einstein who averaged eleven hours of sleep a night. Today, we sleep six or seven hours and are proud of it. And we are tired because of it. Our minds are tired. Our bodies are tired. But much more important, our souls are tired.

We are eternal creatures and we ask eternal questions. Where did I come from? Where am I going? What is the meaning of life? What is right? What is wrong? Is there life after death? These are the primal questions of the soul. And left unanswered, such questions will steal our rest.

Only one other living creature has as much trouble resting as we do. Not dogs, they doze. Not bears, they hibernate. Cats invented the catnap. Most animals know how to rest. There is one exception. These creatures are woolly, simpleminded and slow. No, not husbands on Saturday.

SHEEP! SHEEP CAN'T SLEEP!

For sheep to sleep, everything must be right. No predators. No tension in the flock. No bugs in the air. No hunger in the belly. Everything has to be just so.

Unfortunately, sheep cannot find safe pastures nor can they spray insecticides, deal with the frictions or find food. They need help. They need a shepherd to “lead them” and help them lie down in green pastures. Without a shepherd, they cannot rest.

WITHOUT A SHEPHERD, NEITHER CAN WE.

In the second verse of the Twenty-third Psalm, David the Poet becomes David the Artist. His words paint a picture. A flock of sheep on folded legs, encircling a shepherd. Bellies nestled in the long shoots of grass...a still pond on one side, the watching shepherd on the other.

*In verdant pastures He gives me repose.
Besides restful waters He leads me.*

Note the two pronouns preceding the two verbs—**HE** gives me...**HE** leads me.

Who is the active one? Who is in charge? The shepherd. The shepherd selects the trail and prepares the pasture. The sheep's job—our job—is to watch the shepherd. With our eye on our Shepherd, we'll be able to get some sleep.

But how can we keep our eye on the shepherd when this world we live in gets in the way and keeps us far, far from his call? We tell ourselves we are so busy, who's going to run the store? What about my grades? I've got my sales quota to meet. We offer up one reason after another. Life can get so loud we forget to shut it down. Maybe that's why God made such a big deal about rest in the Ten Commandments.

Of the ten declarations carved in the tablets, which one occupies the most space? Murder? Adultery? Stealing? You'd think so. Certainly, each is worthy of ample coverage. But curiously, these commands are short and to the point. God needed only five English words to condemn adultery and only four to denounce stealing and murder.

But when it came to the topic of rest, one sentence would no suffice. The Third Commandment, as it is stated in the Book of Exodus, has sixty-nine words in it. God knows us so well. Basically God says one day of the week you will say no to work and yes to worship. You will slow down and sit down and lie down and rest.

The bow cannot always be bent without fear of breaking. For a field to bear fruit, it must occasionally lie fallow. And for you or me to truly bring rest to our mind, to our body, and most of all to our soul, we must listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd.

Perhaps we need to change our focus and relax. Perhaps we need to change of schedule and rest! Rest in the Lord! Who invites us to find our way here week after week? Here to green pastures where we can truly find rest.