

Isn't it amazing the amount of time we spend in our lives feeling exhausted? I'm not talking about the exhaustion from a good workout in the gym, or a satisfying day's work. I talking about that bone weary, mentally draining, spiritually depressing exhaustion that just seems to suck the life out of you.

And doesn't it seem that the more success we enjoy at work or in school, the more frequently we struggle with bouts of this level of exhaustion? Why is that? Why do the accomplishments of the secular world drain us so? We work hard, go to church, we pray, we try to do what is right and too often our reward feels an awful lot like punishment.

As we get older and allegedly wiser, we learn quite a lot of useful, and a significant amount of useless information. We are taught various methods of using that information for decision-making. We have procedures like; differential diagnosis, and quantitative analysis, and the military decision making process to name a few. All of these processes are legitimate; they all have benefits and are often helpful, when applied appropriately. However, no matter how much we would like the models to work, at the end of the day, it doesn't matter how accurate and how detailed the information in the model, or how well we follow the process, the answer that spits out on the bottom right corner of the page isn't always the right answer for the situation.

If that isn't bad enough we also have to make 'fuzzy decisions', those decisions based on feelings and ethics and morals that aren't so easily quantified. These are the decisions, the framework that determines the rightness of the results of the quantitative and qualitative models we apply in different situations. That decision matrix that defines who we are as a person.

As adults we often try to analyze based on facts, based on our knowledge. We want to layout rules for just about everything because we think that if we just have the right rule set, everything will work out. So we have law libraries with thousands of books and hundreds of thousands, if not millions of laws, each with their own sets of rules to enforce compliance. And the more of this drivel that we write, the bigger mess we make.

Now enters the unwritten rules, the cultural norms that too often are swayed by whomever can shout the loudest and intimidate the most people into compliance. Following these rules in many instances determines our social circle, and how well we get along with our families.

Rules that change, rules that don't change, things that were abhorrent last month are legitimate activities today, things that were legitimate activities and are suddenly abhorrent. And the Pharisees thought they had it tough with the 613 dictates of the law.

Push this all together along with our almost universal desire to be number 1, the most successful at whatever activity you care to name and it isn't any wonder that we find ourselves physically, mentally and spiritually exhausted by the end of the week.

The root cause of that exhaustion isn't necessarily all of these rules for no other reason than it is impossible for us to follow all of them; it is from us trying to control our environment by using these rules. We are so intent on succeeding, whatever that means, whatever that takes, that we don't dare let go, even if it puts our lives in danger through stress related illnesses and our most important relationships at risk through simple neglect or bad behavior.

How do we address the exhaustion and break out of this destructive behavior? Every time you hear a coach who lost a game speak about their strategy to get ready for the next game, somewhere in there is an emphasis on returning to the fundamentals. The same is true with our lives, when we are overly stressed, overly tired, we need to return to the fundamentals.

Remember how simple life was as a child? Our lives weren't focused on rules, processes and facts; they were focused on relationships. Best friends, favorite teachers, siblings, parents, aunts, uncles and cousins. Somewhere in there, whether we recognized it or not, we established a relationship and an image of Jesus.

We had someone, hopefully several someones, we could trust and when those people we trusted told us something, we believed them. We may have asked a few questions to clarify the subject, but we didn't question the legitimacy of the information, we just sucked it in like the trusting sponges that we were.

Through all the relationships in our lives, many that ended in disappointment, most that ended in neglect, and some that ended in tragedy, the one relationship that is stable and never disappoints is our relationship with Jesus. Yes he disciplines us, and we don't always appreciate it, but it is a discipline of love. We can always count on the fact that every thing he does for us is for our good and our salvation.

Do we want to be done with that bone weary, mentally draining, spiritually depressing exhaustion that just seems to suck the life out of us? Then we need to go back to the fundamental relationship in our lives, our relationship with Jesus. Accept it as a child gives and accepts hugs. Don't debate the fine points of his law; attempting to legitimize bad behavior on our part won't cause him to change. We need to accept responsibility for our actions and reconcile with him in the sacrament.

Put God first. Legitimate authority comes from God. If a man made law or rule isn't supported by God's law then it isn't legitimate so don't obey it. If a social norm is in conflict with God's law, then don't follow it. If our friends reject us because of our insistence on following God's law, just how good of a friend are they?

It sounds like what I'm suggesting is just adding in another layer of laws, but when you get down to it, practicing the virtue of humility, trusting and obeying God, picking up that yoke of his law simplifies life immensely. Our moral and ethical base is fixed in place. The rules for our relationships are fixed in place. Our trust in God, knowing that he is looking out for us, means that we are not alone anymore.

This doesn't mean we can sit in front of the TV all day and munch junk food while we depend on God. This is a relationship and like all relationships both parties have their own responsibilities. We need to count on Jesus for everything, because all that we have, all that we are, all that we ever will be is a gift from him, his end of the yoke. Jesus is counting on us to support his efforts on our behalf by doing what he has asked us to do and carrying his message of salvation out into the world, our end of the yoke.

Saint Augustine said it best; “Our hearts are restless until they rest in thee O Lord.” Let’s pick up our end of the yoke and still our restless hearts. Then see how fast our exhaustion melts away.