

**Sharing *Sacred Rest* by Sandra Dalton-Smith, MD**  
**St. Monica's Walking with Purpose**  
**April 13, 2021, 7:00 – 8:00 p.m.**  
**Presenter: Christine Marie Eberle**

Most of us go through life pretty tired. We're juggling balls, commitments, trying to be many things to many people, scheduling our days down to the minute. We may say "I need rest" or "I need a break" but we don't actively pursue it—possibly because we don't think we deserve it. Rest feels selfish. Self-indulgent. The purpose of *Sacred Rest* is to convince us that that's not so!

Rest is of God

- We have a temptation to think that rest is a luxury we can't afford, rather than an essential component of our spiritual well-being.
- Genesis 2:2-3: On the seventh day, God rested, blessed the seventh day, and made it holy.
- Exodus 20: In the 3rd Commandment, God established the Sabbath--which is not Yiddish for "a day to go to Mass then spend the rest of the day doing work you didn't have time to do in the other six days!"
- Gospels: Jesus frequently went off by himself to a quiet place. In Mark 6:30-32, when his disciples returned from their first missionary venture, he said "come away by yourselves and rest for a while."
- To all of us, in Matthew 11:28 Jesus says "Come to me, you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest."

Sobering Thought

- Rest will win every battle you initiate with it.
- You can either make the time for rest or rest will take the time it needs.
- The stakes are high! You want rest that is chosen, not enforced.

Sleep is not rest.

Sleep is the *product* of rest. Ironically, we sleep better when we're well-rested.

In pursuit of rest, we run after things that don't help

- Vacations in which we simply change the location where we are active is no more restful than being active at home.
- Downsizing your life can be like digging a hole in the sand near the surf line—it just fills with water. Cancelling commitments without a restful plan for filling the gaps only opens the door to filling our time by grazing on things that are not restful

*Agere Contra*

An Ignatian concept meaning "to act against"

Refers to acting against behaviors that are not life-giving and hold us back from freedom

- Figure out what is wearing you out, and act against it (*agere contra*).

- It's not enough to identify what kind of rest we're lacking. It's not enough to stop doing some of the things that wear us down. **We need to actively choose a more restful path.**

## **Seven Types of Rest – NOT SEVEN MORE THINGS TO ADD TO YOUR TO-DO LIST!**

### **#1) Physical Rest: the gentle, intentional use of our body in movement and stillness**

- Passive – sleeping and napping
- Active – stretching, breathing exercises, soaking baths, gentle walks

#### Suggestions:

- Do something WITH your body to balance what you do TO your body. Notice where there is tension and address it
- Light aerobic activity increases circulation and takes disease-fighting, inflammation-reducing cells to the places in need of healing.
- Don't confuse exercise for weight loss with activities promoting bodily peace
- Practice “sleep hygiene” – don't slam into sleep and expect it to work

### **#2) Mental Rest: taking a break from problem-solving and negative spirals**

When the mind is tired, it no longer has the ability to effectively control the body and reflexes.

#### Mental noise:

- Self-critiquing inner monologue
- Repetitive thoughts
- Reliving past events, rehearsing what you could have done better
- What if's
- Escapism / Fantasizing / Planning
- Continuously running inner commentary / hamster wheel
- Not being fully present – always thinking about something else
- “The life-changing magic of tidying up your mind starts with letting go of those thoughts that are not producing a positive effect in your life.”

#### Suggestions:

- Time-blocking – chunk things into the time of day when you are best able to do them
- Set a time-limit on mentally-fatiguing activities (like social media scroll)
- Meditate – actively practice letting go of thoughts
- Create a mental sanctuary – a place your mind can rest

### **#3) Emotional Rest: letting go of the need to perform; able be ourselves.**

- We have been trained to set our emotions aside to do what must be done.
- Cope cope cope. Flip the switch. Hell on hold.
- We have been trained to put on the face people expect to see
- We have been trained to pour out emotions in response to others' needs.
- We absorb the negative energy of people around us (Emotional canaries in coal mines.)
- Emotional translator for the men in our lives? (“What your father really meant was . . .”) Exhausting!



Suggestions:

- “Open yourself to regular communion with the bread of self-disclosure and the wine of community.”
- Pay attention your feelings in different settings, with different people. Notice where you need to fake it, and with whom you can be yourself. Opt out of toxicity when you can.
- Give yourself permission to cease comparing and trying to fit in.
- Risk vulnerability. Expressing an authentic emotion is more restful than coping or performing.

#### **#4) Social Rest: creating space for relationships that truly revive you**

How is this different from Emotional Rest? I think EMOTIONAL is about ourselves: how we exhaust ourselves in certain settings. SOCIAL is about other people: finding those who fill us.

- The soul hungers for connection w/ people who “get us,” (vs. lonely in a crowd).
- Note that the pandemic has been hard on this, as isolation has made it harder to maintain ties with those outside our immediate bubble.
- “The quality of your connections is significantly more important than the quantity.”
- Reciprocal relationships are those that give to us as well as take from us.
- The presence of a trusted confidante creates an atmosphere of rest.
- This does not mean you need a husband/sister/BFF. Socially restful connections can be found in AA, support group, WWP . . . anywhere you can be seen, appreciated, restored.

Suggestions:

- Prioritize face to face encounters (in person is better than onscreen is better than texting)
- Be sure to listen as well as speak; foster the connection from your end.
- Nurture your need to connect; if you are weary in this area, expand your social network to find people who share your values, interests, etc.

#### **# 5 Sensory Rest: taking break from the relentless assault of modern life on our five senses**

We are all in sensory overload.

- Staring at screens in situations where we used to look at people
- Taste buds dulled by ever-saltier, creamier, sweeter foods
- Constant background noise of electronics (clock, lights, refrigerator, traffic, lawnmower)
- Even smells—so many artificial smells, including hand sanitizer!
- “When our senses continue receiving incoming information without a break, the nervous system becomes too congested to process the information appropriately. The result is a decline in happiness, stifled creativity, mental restlessness, and blunted performance.”

Suggestions:

- Eyes – take a 20 second break every 20 minutes and look at something 20 feet away.
- Find time each day to unplug from all technology (and, in general, don’t be a slave to it).
- Notice how you react to smells, sounds, fabrics. Try adding positive ones.

- Target one stressor at a time and see how you can move against it. (Fresh air, pure water, silence, darkness)

**#6 Creative Rest: allowing enough “white space” in your life to make room for your creativity to show up—whatever that looks like.**

- The rest one finds when immersed in beauty
- Not about “making art.” Lets you focus on your basic need for wonder, without putting any pressure on you to be creative.
- “In creation, God established a pattern of work and rest for us to follow—a divine example of the benefits of creative rest and how it brings out an appreciation of the good.”
- “Creative rest uses all God has created around us to create something inside us.”

Suggestions:

- Nature! Breathe. Behold.
- Build “sabbaticals” into your life – as simple as blocking out time in your day for rejuvenation
- Practice flow-break rhythm (work in blocks of no more than 90 minutes to 2 hours)
- Work *with* your body clock, not against it. Go with the circadian flow!

**#7 Spiritual Rest: be with God alone, not an idea about God, or the practice of religion**

- “Sanctuary is not simply a place; it’s a state of being. There we find a sense of security and peace that flows from our connection to God. Sanctuary is where we lay down our fight and rest.”
- Some of you spend a lot of time in the actual sanctuary—church work, volunteering, service, study, WWP. Those are all good—but not necessarily restful. Need to find time to be with God alone.

Suggestions:

- Share your day with God (written or verbal) as with a good friend
- Lift both hands high above your head and say “I need help!”
- Choose an affirmation / mantra / consoling quote or Scripture passage and use it regularly to bring your pain of mind, body or soul to God.

Closing Prayer:

O Lord, support us all the day long, until the shadows lengthen, and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over, and our work is done. Then in your mercy, grant us a safe lodging, and a holy rest, and peace at the last. Amen.

~ The Book of Common Prayer