

Clean Out Your Desk, Naps. You're Being Replaced.

by Steven Miller

Education in the faith by the parents should begin in the child's earliest years. —CCC 2226

Sunday mornings my mother got up early—and dragged me kicking and screaming out of bed and into my nicest jeans and sweater. I have still never thanked her. (I'm borrowing, of course, but that doesn't make it any less true.)

One of my great joys in life is sleep. I sleep long and I sleep often. If you promised me a plate of my favorite St. Louis BBQ to cut a nap short, I would tell you, with great pains, to come back later. Now, once I'm awake I can be bargained with, but in medius rest I am unyielding.

On those Sunday mornings, though, while my heathen friends were sleeping in, I was being propped up against my will in a middle pew at the evangelical church down the street. It was probably the most substantial philosophical issue I had with Christianity. Some people can't accept the mystical nature of the trinity; others balk at the idea of moral absolutes; still others crave more empirical evidence of a divine creator. My reasons were purely axiological. That is, I placed a greater value on sleeping in than the church did. And it's probably why I stayed away so long.

However, college came and rowdy Friday nights and Saturday nights soon brought reflective Sunday mornings. I longed for something sleeping in wouldn't provide. Throughout junior high and high school I had become so fixated on getting sleep on Sundays that I'd forgotten to rest.

***...then with cracked hands that ached
from labor in the weekday weather made***

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banked fires blaze. No one ever thanked him.

—“Those Winter Sundays”

Robert Hayden's poem is about a father who gets up early every Sunday, even though he is exhausted by the weekday work that cracks his hands and tries his patience, just so he can provide his son with something valuable. As fatherhood quickly approaches, it is a poem I've been thinking about a lot lately.

When Susan told me she was pregnant, it was six in the morning. I rejoiced with her over our great blessing, and then I looked at the clock and rejoiced once again because I knew I could sleep another thirty minutes on the couch before making breakfast. Right now, on a Friday evening or a Sunday afternoon, I have the ability to take a nap if I've been going too hard for too long. I can tell Susan, “I am exhausted and I know we have plans, but I just really need some sleep.” Very soon that may no longer be the case because, in the not so distance, I can see a new threat to my sleep approaching. An adorable threat with two arms, two legs, and a potentially wailing head. And no, it's not a baby velociraptor.

While some parents worry about their finances or their baby's safety or any of the other million things we've now been instructed to worry about, I am single-mindedly worrying about where I'll get my next nap—before our little siren has even arrived.

This requires an apprenticeship in self-denial, sound judgment, and self-mastery—the preconditions of all true freedom. Parents should teach their children to subordinate the “material and instinctual dimensions to interior and spiritual ones.” Parents have a grave responsibility to give good example to their children. —CCC 2223

When we got pregnant the first time, Susan asked me to make a promise—that I would give up my early morning naps once the baby arrived. Since we've been married, I've had a carefully calibrated morning routine which involves waking up, showering, napping, starting the coffee, kind of napping again, and then making the breakfast. It ends with me half-dressed, eating cereal and watching *The Office*, and then frantically running around our tiny apartment

at 7:29 with a tie in one hand and a coffee thermos in the other. (I'm not sure why she wants our routine to change...)

I am reminded again and again, though, that to love is to be willing to sacrifice. And so in a few weeks, I will say good-bye to my sleeping in, my morning naps, and most likely a host of other sleep-related pleasures as well. I will get up early and rouse my child(ren) for Mass and they will look into my eyes and say, "Why are you doing this to me? I don't even *like* Father N."

As Jim would say, "Lord beer me strength." I know that He will. And hopefully, He'll also remind me that fatherhood is not a circumstance that just happened to me but rather a vocation I've been preparing for my whole life.

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