

Archbishop Smith: Summer at Home

I get the impression that many people will not be venturing far for summer vacation in this unforgettable year of 2020. Travel restrictions abound because of the pandemic. People are saying that they had hoped to make a trip to one destination or another, but travel advisories and quarantine mandates are causing them to stay home. Even if restrictions are eased, finding things to do near home often remains the preferred option, given the abiding fear of COVID-19.

As a concept, “home” is experienced differently from one person to the next. It may be associated with a dwelling, a birthplace, a network of close relationships. Many people – too many – are entirely without a home, whether that be due to having no abode or simply through loneliness. Staying “at home”, or doing things “near home” this summer will be either a welcome or unwelcome prospect, depending upon the person’s experience of “home”.

In the Christian view, “home” is our relationship with God. Within this relationship, all hoped-for experiences of a real home become actual – safety and security, peace, happiness, self-discovery and affirmation, freedom and acceptance, room for growth, mutual and unconditional love between persons, and so on. While the “homes” we try to create for ourselves often do not meet these expectations, being “at home” with God always does.

So, this summer, whether we travel or not, let’s stay at home with God. What might this look like? I offer the following suggestions.

Summer Reading: Many of us have been compiling a list of books we would love to read over the quiet months of summer. Let’s place the Bible at the top of that catalogue. We could simply take a few minutes daily with the Gospel assigned for the mass of the day, ponder its message and ask the Lord to help us allow His Word to take deep root in our hearts.

Summer Eating: BBQ’s, picnics, seasonal foods. These all come to the minds of many folks when they think of summer time. Let’s not forget the Bread of Life, the Eucharist. Mass is not meant to be an occasional activity from which Catholics take a break. In this time of pandemic, we have the option of in-person or livestream participation in the celebration of the Eucharist. Let’s keep this central to our lives.

Summer Visiting: Time with family and friends is a wonderful way to mark the summer months. Staying at home with God means being cognizant of other people who could use a visit. Who is alone at home? Who is in hospital or a long-term care facility? With whom have I not been in contact for a long time? What relationships need healing? People in such situations can be “visited” in a number of ways, including via virtual contact.

Summer Activities: I know that golf comes first to everyone's mind, but I will make mention of it anyway, together with swimming, boating, and hiking, as examples of activities we associate with the summer break. As we contemplate staying at home with God, let's consider works of charity as an important summer activity. What's happening in the parish that could use my assistance? Does the local food bank or homeless shelter need volunteers? How might I offer financial support to the Church's works or to the mission of a charitable organization I favour?

God loves our company. Let's "stay at home" and, in these ways, spend lots of time with Him.