THE SCHOLAR’S JOURNAL

2018

The Aquinas Scholars Honors Program

Editor: Valerie Brukhis
This is a photo taken in Pingvellir, the only UNESCO World Heritage Site in Iceland. Pingvellir translates to “the fields of Parliament” and earned its name when Norse chiefs would meet there to discuss justice on the island from the 10th to 18th centuries. I visited over January Term and fell in love with the enchanting landscape.

Rose Misey
God created humanity in his image as physical beings, giving dignity to our bodies. By disregarding this dignity, we do violence to the image of God. Disrespecting God’s image damages our relationship with Him. Christians typically avoid doing harm to their body and their relationship with God through abstaining from sexual immorality; however, little attention is given to the physical and spiritual harm caused by ignoring exercise and sleep.

In order to address the five components of fitness, the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) recommends the following: strength/endurance training each major muscle group 2-3 days per week, engaging in 150 minutes of moderate aerobic activity per week, stretching 2-3 days per week, and maintaining a body fat percentage of 7-19% and 14-24% for men and women, respectively. Through adhering to the ACSM’s recommendations, adults can reduce their risk of developing five of the ten leading causes of death in America: heart disease, stroke, cancer, type II diabetes, and influenza. Exercise also helps prevent osteoporosis, is a treatment for anxiety and depression, and improves people’s ability to perform daily tasks such as playing with their kids or taking out the garbage. From reducing risk of death to improving quality of life, few things have the health benefits of regular exercise.

Our current bodies may seem to be a minor blessing, but God clearly cares how we steward minor blessings (Matt 25:14-30). In the parable of the talents, the master gives three servants a monetary investment of five, two, and one talents, respectively. The first and second servant are good stewards, doubling their respective allotments of five and two talents. However, the third servant is lazy, burying his talent and returning it upon the master’s homecoming. Because they are faithful with little, the first and second servant are rewarded with much and enter into the joy of their master. Whereas the third servant’s talent is taken, and he is deemed wicked and slothful. The third servant was punished for doing nothing with his single talent. However, the first servant did not receive a larger reward than the second servant for producing five talents rather than two.
Both servants were rewarded for stewarding their money. As with the servants, the playing field of exercise is not equal; better genetics, proximity to a gym, and access to information about exercise technique all influence our physical fitness. Fortunately, God takes our circumstances into account and does not call us all to be five talent producing athletes with perfect bodies. However, He does not permit us to bury our talents by living an unhealthy life; we need to be good stewards of the bodies God gave us.

In addition to exercise, sleep is a vital component of health. During sleep, cerebrospinal fluid clears the waste produced by the brain’s daytime activities. To fully rejuvenate the brain, the average adult requires 7-9 hours of sleep. Robbing the body of this recovery time paves the way for physical and mental consequences. Mentally, it decreases cognitive performance, increases risk-taking behavior, causes interpersonal problems, and exacerbates anxiety and depression. Physically, it decreases immunity, causes weight gain, increases blood pressure, and promotes insulin resistance. Ignorant or indifferent towards these consequences, people now sleep 80% less than they did 100 years ago.

In Genesis 1 and 2, God took six days to create the world and everything in it, resting on the seventh day. Wanting humanity to rest as He did, God declared the 7th day of the week the Sabbath and commanded that no physical work be done on this holy day (Deu 5:12-15). During the time of Moses, doing work on the Sabbath was punishable by death (Num 15:32-36). People were not punished because doing work on Saturdays is inherently bad; disobeying God’s Law is what merited death. The themes of rest and following the Law came together in the Lord of the Sabbath, Jesus Christ. Jesus was perfectly righteous, because as God, He could follow God’s Law as no human could. Through his death, Jesus offers us this righteousness; in accepting Christ’s gift, we can rest from the impossible task of justifying ourselves through living a perfect life. As physical death was a punishment for breaking the Sabbath, spiritual death is a punishment for rejecting Christ’s gift.
As demonstrated by these severe punishments, God places great importance on rest. This theme of the need for rest is highlighted by the necessity of sleep. Able to create us without the need to sleep, God saw fit to give us 7-9 hours of rest each day along with consequences for ignoring this need. Although less severe than the repercussions of breaking the Sabbath and incomparable to those for rejecting Christ, the consequences of ignoring God’s gift of sleep suggest that it too is a gift that should be embraced.

Through ignoring exercise and sleep, Christians neglect their duty to be good stewards and disregard the importance God places on rest. Getting 7-9 hours of sleep and meeting the five components of physical fitness is difficult. It is easier to follow Adam and Eve’s example and put our desires before the will of God. Tempting as it may be, Christians are not called to take the path they deem easiest; we are called to die to ourselves and submit to God’s will (Gal 5:24; Jas 4:7). Therefore, honor God with your bodies (1 Cor 6:20).
Dear Future Self

Althea Larson for COJO 451 (Advanced Multimedia Reporting)

Cast of “Dear Future Self,” going over notes during final dress rehearsal Tuesday, March 13. The actors teamed up with Wonderlust Productions to present a play about the different experiences St. Thomas students had on campus.

Actress Becca Cameron (pictured fourth from right) and others reenacting the racial slur incident from the 2016-2017 school year. “Dear Future Self,” performed in Scooter’s, Wednesday, March 14, 2018.

Actors sleeping before the “Anxiety Dance” scene, which depicts how students feel throughout their daily lives. St. Thomas junior Madi Miller (center) began planning the performance in January 2018 and rehearsals began 11 days before opening night.

Nadya Anderson playing a scientist attempting to create a “Super Tommie.” Students who shared what they felt the average St. Thomas student was were the inspiration behind this scene.
With Spring Break in the rearview, I thought it would be a good time to share the first installment in my Scary Senior Spring Break.

On one of our first days, we were walking along the beach and came across a rock pier extending into the ocean. An adventure I couldn’t pass up, I left my parents and four sisters on the sand as I walked out into the water. Now it was a little breezy and the rock surface was a little uneven, but nothing I couldn’t handle. Until, well, the crab. I had been holding my hat on my head as a safety precaution. But when Evil Eight-legs decided to scuttle right next to my feet, my hat was no longer my main concern. I had to escape. However, in my moment of fear my hat had blown off my head and landed innocently among the waves, a good fifty feet to my right. Knowing the odds of it gently washing up to shore were slim, I sighed and resigned myself to go get it. I took off my flip-flops, preparing for an elegant climb down the rocks before I would wade in the waist deep water to get my hat. So naturally I slid on my butt, rocks cutting my legs, and all but fell into the water. Still, I raised my hands triumphantly as I faced my family, cause hey, I’d made it. But in my stumble, I had dropped a flip-flop. I tried to snatch it before it thought it would be fun to run away like my dumb hat (still in my peripheral vision, mind you, but drifting farther away). But of course, it would be asking too much for the ocean floor to be normal and flat, and WHOOP my foot fell into a divot, and WHOOP there went my other flip-flop. By now I was fully soaked - my shirt, shorts, and most of my hair were completely drenched. My poor family continued to watch in disbelief. Laughing a little but defeated by my misfortune, I managed to grab all my items, only suffering complete submersion twice.
As I waded to shore, I noticed a surfer dude (really there’s no other way to describe this
guy - ripped body, flowing locks, board tucked under his arm) standing near my family, also
watching me thoughtfully. Then, I kid you not, this complete stranger turned to my
embarrassed family and said, “Graceful, like a swan.”

Now if you thought that was enough trouble for little me, you are mistaken. Just a few
days later, we were back by the ocean, but this time in a more secluded spot. We all went into
the water this time, but I had my sights set on a rock outcropping (I know, shouldn’t I have been
wary at this point) I needed to climb, maybe 100 feet from shore. So, I headed out as my mom
continually called behind me, “Not too far, honey!” and “Stay closer!” I thought she was
overreacting cause, you know, moms, but turns out there had been a TIGER SHARK ATTACK AT
THIS VERY BEACH TWO WEEKS EARLIER. If I would’ve known at the time I wouldn’t have put a
toe into the water. Granted, that’s why she didn’t tell us. Anyway, I swam out to this partially
submerged rock structure and started to climb. I wanted to be King of the Rock, duh. However,
the rocks were reeeal slippery so I had to be cautious. I grabbed on, then found a solid hold for
my left foot. But I was putting my right foot down and holy spiky shooting pain. NOT GOOD NOT
GOOD WHAT JUST HAPPENED TO MY FOOT. I tried to grab it with my hand but then my pain
shot through my fingers. At that point I launched off the rock and headed to shore thinking,
“My fingers? How did it hurt my fingers?” I was able to make it back to the shore where I sat
myself on the sand to assess the damage. I had a scattering of black specks dug into my skin.
My foot was slowly turning red and swelling, and the stinging was not receding. My parents
came over to look, unsure of what happened. Even though they weren’t sure, I knew what had
happened: sea urchin.
As expected, my mom and I got in the rental car to make the 90-minute trek to the single urgent care on the island - just for the record, not before four - FOUR - different locals offered to pee on it. Yeahhh, no thanks. We arrived just before sunset and the doctor waved us in.

One look and she clarified that one: I had, in fact, stepped on a sea urchin, and two: no, it wasn’t one of the 2 out of 10 that were poisonous (Um, that was a possibility?!). Eyeing my foot, she then told us that she could dig out the spines, but it would be useless as they would eventually come out on their own. So, she sent us out of there with a weird foot cream and instructions to soak my foot in vinegar (ew) and we were on our way. Now is where I tell you it healed nicely and I no longer thought about my sea urchin foot. Alas, that was not the case.

Most of the pieces of spine had made their way out of my foot in the following days, but one little speck was still bothering me. Weeks later, home from vacation, that little speck was still bothering me. At this point I was determined. It was the night before Prom, and I didn’t think I could dance with my foot in pain. So, I attempted to get it out. Nothing happened at first, but then with a perfectly angled poke, IT MOVED! Something began coming out of my foot and I straight up screamed. When the movement stopped, I calmed down. Lying next to my foot was a 2 cm, fully intact spike that had been in my foot for weeks. Heart rate calming, I went to put the little guy in a place of honor on my shelf (as witness to my battle wounds).

Naturally, I then had to share the story of the stubborn spike with anyone who would listen. That sea urchin caused me a whole lot of trouble. But hey, Prom was fun.
Approximately eleven million people residing in the United States are illegal immigrants. However, many of these people were brought into the United States as children, unable to make the decision to come for themselves and instead following their parents. These people often fled oppression or poverty in pursuit of the American Dream. Nevertheless, many of these people are faced with hatred and discrimination from American citizens and politicians. The President of the United States even referenced these people as being inferior, saying, “Those shitholes send us the people they don't want.” He also made the decision to cut the deferred action for childhood arrivals program (known as DACA) last September. There is much uncertainty surrounding the status of this program and how future legislation will affect the approximately 800,000 individuals protected by this program through deferred deportation and granted work permits. Applying Catholic Social thought to establish a stance on this issue justifies the grounds for why the DACA program is important and should be defended by citizens and lawmakers. *Strangers No Longer, Together on the Journey of Hope; Laborem exercens* and *Justice in the World* are all Catholic social documents that help develop the Catholic position on immigration, which can be applied to DACA legislation.

A common theme across the many documents concerning Catholic social tradition is protection for those in need. The tradition aims to protect every person’s dignity, often by granting people different rights. Included in these God-given rights is the right to migrate. Yet, in America, many immigrants are referred to as “aliens.”
This term focuses on dividing people, making them seem more different than as brothers and sisters of God; this term which is the same name for extraterrestrial life outside of Earth, when applied to immigrants, makes them out to be outsiders. Yet, the Church loves and welcomes these people. “Pope Pius XII reaffirms the Church’s commitment to caring for pilgrims, aliens, exiles, and migrants of every kind [...] affirming that all peoples have the right to conditions worthy of human life and, if these conditions are not present, the right to migrate.” Rather than using alien as a term to belittle immigrants, the traditions would encourage providing these people extra support to ensure their access to conditions worthy of human life. The DACA program is an example of legislation that promotes conditions worthy of human life. Instead of deporting individuals brought to the United States as children who often do not truly know their homeland, this program serves to grant these individual rights to stay for two years, while establishing for them the ability to work.

The freedom to work is a belief fundamental to Catholic social thought. Many encyclicals and other forms of social doctrine have addressed this freedom, emphasizing the importance of human dignity being promoted throughout these working relations. *Laborem exercens*, written by Pope John Paul II, focuses on how work shapes a person. He considers the person performing the work the important part of the work, rather than the product produced or the task achieved by the worker. John Paul II argues that work should bring about the person’s realization of humanity. God’s calling for humans to “subdue the Earth” means humans can relate to the World and more importantly, God, through their work.
Working is important to a person because the Creator commands them to and they are able to develop in their humanity. Because work helps a person actualize these goals, work must be a freedom for all people, regardless of their immigration status. John Paul II proclaims, “The person working away from his or her native land, whether as a permanent emigrant or as a seasonal worker, should not be placed at a disadvantage in comparison with the other workers in that society in the matter of working rights.” This stance can be applied to the DACA Program; allowing immigrants, even if they are labeled “illegal”, the right to work gives them the freedom to exercise the commands given to all people by God and further allows for their realization of their humanity. The DACA program grants otherwise undocumented immigrants who were brought to the country as children work permits. Often, these permits may be renewed so long as the individual continues to work and does not commit any felonies or significant misdemeanors.

A major factor contributing to immigration to the United States is people looking to escape poverty in their homelands. However, when children are brought into the United States illegally, it becomes more difficult for them to find jobs when they reach working age because of their lack of documentation. This often leads to young immigrants taking up jobs where they work for money under the table; this means employers can more easily exploit them since their work is not regulated by the government. Employers are able to pay undocumented workers under minimum wage without regulation of their working conditions, overtime or benefits.
Justice in the World, a renowned piece of Catholic social doctrine, examines this issue. More than half of the bishops who came together to write this document came from developing nations, joining with bishops from wealthy nations for dialogue concerning justice in the world. While the document does not specifically reference immigration, it is applicable to undocumented immigration because of its discussion on marginalized individuals. “The stifling oppressions of the rapid growth of population, [...] as well as the massive migratory flow to the cities have left many workers unemployed,” the Catholic Bishops begin. These conditions “give rise to great numbers of ‘marginal’ persons, ill-fed, inhumanely housed, illiterate, deprived of political power and unable to attain the suitable means of acquiring responsibility and moral dignity,” they add. Undocumented immigrants are often oppressed to the point where they are forced into the category of ‘marginal persons,’ unable to access jobs and stuck in a poverty similar to the kind they often attempted to escape in their homeland. Because of their lack of citizenship, they have little, if any, political power and opportunity to access the American Dream falsely promoted in our nation. The bishops who met to contribute to Justice in the World call for an end to systems and institutions that exclude people and seek to discriminate. The DACA program seeks to reduce discrimination against undocumented workers. By providing these law-abiding immigrants documentation and work permits they can work to gain financial security, reducing the number of immigrants living as ‘marginal persons.’
No person should live in conditions where they become a ‘marginal person.’ Unfortunately, many people suffer through conditions where they are marginalized and forced into this state. Supporting and creating legislation that serves to reduce this discrimination will help promote justice for all of God’s children. DACA serves to reduce this discrimination for immigrants brought into the United States as children. Applying catholic social tradition to take a position on this program shows how important it is to support DACA. Strangers No Longer, Together on the Journey of Hope; Laborem exercens and Justice in the World all illuminate ideologies that support justice and dignity for all people, including undocumented immigrants. With continued support of DACA the dignity of the 800,000 young people can be promoted as an important step towards a more just world.
I took this photo this past J-Term in a small Polish town, Zamość. While the town is incredibly beautiful and historic, during World War II it was chosen as an ideal location for German spread. To this end, the Nazis aggressively relocated the Polish and Jewish inhabitants of Zamość.

Really bad news for the town, but on the bright side it was preserved well.

Elena Ryan