

## Lent III

“All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.” Mother and deaf to refusal.  
Goose.

No serious Catholic would dispute the authority of Mother Goose, at least not with words. But in actions many a Catholic does go against her advice.

One of the great means to combat the predominant fault is good recreation. But it is missing in the lives of the faithful. When I hear confessions, I often try to pay attention to the amendment of life, which is not unimportant to the Sacrament of Penance, given that many sins call out for an increase or improvement of recreation. Yet if asked about recreation there are often responses which indicate there is little or no recreation in many people's lives.

Our good Lord said that we would have to become like children to enter the kingdom of God, and in fact it is only with childlike wonder that we can best appreciate the Roman Rite with its symbolism and even the architecture that goes with it.

The American author Henry Adams once wrote about the great cathedral of Chartres, France, one of the world's finest examples of Gothic architecture. He was Protestant, so he had no background in Catholic theology, but he was a good student of architecture. He had heard of the Catholic ability to express theology in stone as much as in a painting or a hymn. So he traveled to Chartres, and by just looking at, reflecting on, and wondering about the cathedral, he was able to understand much about what the theology of the time taught about the Blessed Virgin. Here is an example of what he learned through his keen observation:

“To the Church, no doubt, its cathedral here has a fixed and administrative meaning, which is the same as that of every other bishop's seat and with which we have nothing whatever to do. To us, it is a child's fancy; a toyhouse to please the Queen of Heaven—to please her so much that she would be happy in it—to charm her till she smiled.

The Queen Mother was as majestic as you like; she was absolute; she could be stern; she was not above being angry; but she was still a woman, who loved grace, beauty, ornament—her toilette, robes, jewels; who considered the arrangements of her palace with attention, and liked both light and color; who kept a keen eye on her Court, and exacted prompt and willing obedience from king and archbishops as well as from beggars and drunken priests. She protected her friends and punished her enemies. She required space, beyond what was known in the Courts of kings, because she was liable at all times to have ten thousand people begging her for favors—mostly inconsistent with the law—

She was extremely sensitive to neglect, to disagreeable impressions, to want of intelligence in her surroundings. She was the greatest artist, as she was the greatest philosopher and musician and theologian, that ever lived on earth, except her Son, Who, at Chartres, is still an infant under her guardianship. Her taste was infallible; her sentence eternally final. This church was built for her in this spirit of simple-minded, practical, utilitarian faith—in this singleness of thought, exactly as a little girl sets up a doll-house for her favorite blond doll. Unless you can go back to your dolls, you are out of place here. If you can go back to them, and get rid for one small hour of the weight of custom, you shall see Chartres in glory.”

The childlike wonder about which Adams was writing has been snuffed out of the lives of so many that it is like a memory of something long ago. The snuffing was done by excessive electronic entertainment for one example. The senses become over-stimulated with most of this sort of entertainment, and imagination and memory are damaged. This is one reason why I shot my television in 1989 with a 12 gauge, which really did the job.

To revive wonder is the task of education, especially Catholic education in our times. I speak of an elementary approach, and elemental series of courses, where one discovers the love of wisdom; a course for beginners, who look upon the primary things of the world, as it were, for the first time.

To replace the television with good recreation, try reading good poetry, or playing soccer instead of just watching it, or learn basic calligraphy to send a hand-written letter to grandmother that you should have written a year ago, or learn how to waltz, or go out and spend time gazing up at the stars.

Doing poetry is Quixotic – memorizing it, reciting it; being mannerly and waltzing are Quixotic, taking sides. Words like truth and faith and honor and love and courtesy and courtship and decency and simplicity and modesty are Quixotic. And the realities for which those words stand are, in the Iron Age, so Quixotic as to be positively despised by the sophisticated. I assert that such realities are not a sentimental "impossible dream," not a crazy anachronism, but rather the objects of an entirely possible dream which is the paradigm of sanity.

"Know, Sancho, I was born in this Iron Age to restore the age of Gold." - Don Quixote