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Finding God in Golf and Spring

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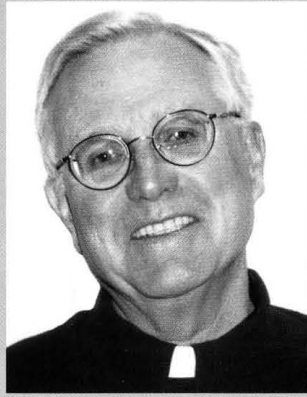
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Never is our Marquette University campus so beautiful as during early May, the week between final exams and the Sunday of graduation. Bushes are pink with blossoms; trees are soft green with budding leaves. Alas, few students are around to enjoy the beauty. It is the perfect time to walk the campus, to reflect on the good times of the year, to thank the Lord for all the wonderful young women and men we teachers have worked with during the past semesters, to say a prayer for those about to graduate that they may use the knowledge and skills acquired over four years to go out and change the so-called real world, to enrich it by sharing their values and faith with everybody they will encounter over the coming decades of their lives.

It is also the best week of the year to relax. And while there are a thousand good ways to do so, the best way for me is on a golf course. The heart of every Jesuit is formed by the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius, the final meditation of which is the Contemplation for Obtaining Love, a reflection that teaches us to find and love God in all things, because He is in all things and labors in all things, giving them life and beauty so that in them we find reflections of his beauty and goodness. Nothing is so central to Jesuit spirituality as this finding God in all things.

To be sure, our God is present in prayer and the sacraments, but He is also in all the people we come into contact with, in all we see and hear and do. We can find God in our relaxation



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better than in most other things. Where better to relax than on a well-kept golf course with trees and ponds, all green and rich with the sweet smell of spring?

The richer green of the fairways makes a pleasing contrast with the darker hue of the rough. Along the out-of-bounds there lie trees and low bushes still flecked with flowers. A swan swims serenely across that menacing water hazard. But all is at peace – praise the God of peace!

All sports should bring joy, but for me none brings more than springtime golf. There one enjoys the company of friends and thanks the Lord for them. They are not our opponents but our allies as together we confront the course and learn to overcome our own unsteady nerves. We can never blame the referee since in golf we are our own referee; and we must confess our errant shots, our golf sins, and not try to pretend we are innocent and blame the other guy.

Golf is a civil game – it is unthinkable to scream when somebody else is taking a shot the way basketball fans do when opponents step to the free-throw line. Thanks to the handicap system, there is a level playing field so that your grandmother can take on Tiger Woods. Who then can say God is unfair?

Rather, as we drive back home, even after a bad round, let us say with Job, “The Lord has given, the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord.” And when we get home, we can find God again in a cold beer or soft drink, in warm memories of the good shots that make us long for more while being ever mindful of our potential to build a better golf swing and a better world. ¶

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Fr. Donnelly is a history professor at Marquette University. For more on his views of life's lessons discovered through golf, go to www.wisprovupdates.org to read his classic article "Golf as a Spiritual Exercise."

