

WHY I'M ANTI-LUNCH

I don't like lunch. I have no problem with lunch on weekends, but on weekdays, that is a different matter altogether. Here's why.

The Catholic League, thank God, continues to grow by leaps and bounds. As a result, I am frequently asked to have lunch with people to discuss the secrets of our success. Sometimes the request is simply to "touch base," other times prominent individuals will seek my advice, and occasionally I am asked to join with them in a joint effort. While I have no aversion to any of these overtures, I have a problem with entertaining them over lunch. To be sure, there are exceptions, but in general my answer is no.

Most "working lunches" are a waste of time. Little is accomplished at lunches, and when it's over there are messages that need to be answered and media that need to be contacted. It's not just the two hours that were spent at lunch that need to be made up, the time away from the office breaks the rhythm of the day, making it all the more difficult to get back into the swing of things.

We pride ourselves at the Catholic League with doing an awful lot with a short staff. We put in long hours doing the kind of work our members are paying us to do. If I had lunch with everyone who extends an invitation, I would weigh 500 lbs. and accomplish a fraction of what I'm able to do right now. That's why a quick hot dog on the streets of New York works well for me.

Another problem I have with lunch is that most of the time is spent talking about someone's wish list. But doing, not talking, is what counts. There are plenty of other opportunities to talk about special projects without wasting time in the middle of the day. Discussing new ventures can be

done over the phone, or over a beer after work, but they don't need to be done at the expense of time away from the office.

Many good intentioned people are deep into process. But process short of a defined goal and timetable is a joke. The old adage, "there's no time like the present," rings true, and it would be refreshing if more people on our side tried to actualize this maxim. Why they don't is no mystery.

Once a project has been outlined, it needs execution. Immediate execution. But too often what happens is that a lack of courage kills a good idea. Then the process starts all over again with yet another agenda item that will go by the wayside.

What exactly are people afraid of? The adversaries of the Catholic Church—and there are many of them—don't lack for courage, so why should we? There are more good people, non-Catholics as well as Catholics, who are ready to support us in our efforts, making inexplicable the lack of fortitude on our side. Hang-wringing over lunch makes for self-righteousness, not action, and that is why occasions that provide for such opportunities should be avoided.

Another problem with lunches is that too often people are more interested in feeding their egos than their stomach. Name-dropping has never impressed me—quite the contrary, it's a bore—so when that starts happening, I tune out. The world is full of people who know people, but in the end rubbing shoulders gives me the rub: once you've met them, then what? Is it really important to have one more business card in your pocket?

Lunches, it is said, are good for "networking." They are indeed. But once that's been done, then what? And even if the contact that has been made is fruitful for both parties, and not just for one, couldn't such "networking" have taken place in some other venue? What's wrong with a half hour appointment

at the office? At least those pretend to be doing work while watching a game in a “sky box” are typically doing it on their own time, which is more than can be said of those who bolt from the office to “network” with some new Joe or Josephine.

Over the past few months I have spoken in Florida, Texas, Wyoming, Virginia, California and Pennsylvania, and everywhere I go I find an appetite for leadership, a willingness to fight the good fight. With so many people standing behind the Catholic League, we can't let them down. And it is not easy to see how we can please our members by visiting the latest restaurant at noon.

“Doing lunch” is not a prescription for achievement, rather it is an excuse for doing nothing. So that's why I'm anti-lunch. Hope you are, too.