**A matter of time**

Every country on earth has some kind of cliché or stereotype attached that portends to describe the personality characteristics of its people. Germans are hardworking, the conventional wisdom concludes; the French are romantic; the Irish are fun loving; the Swiss are efficient. The labels go all the way around the globe. And there’s a bit of truth to all of them and a lot of error, as well. But whatever the balance of truth in the markers, the conviction that there are such things as national characteristics cling to a people like oil on rock. The labels say something about the qualities a people value, about the nature of their culture, about their priorities.

My young father, dead at 25, left nothing behind for me except his prayer book and one prayer card. I read it over and over as a child. It’s been gone for years but I remember parts of it yet. It read:

*I have only just a minute,
Only 60 seconds in it.
Given to me, didn’t choose it.
Mustn’t waste it, can’t refuse it
But I must suffer if I lose it.*

There was more to that doggerel, of course, but I have forgotten that by now—but not its message. On the contrary, the basic message got through to me and haunted me. It was legacy enough for the rest of my life. The American mantra, I learned, is time.

We are, in fact, obsessed with time. We’re a pragmatic, productive people, and time is the national God. It shows in our language. No other people on earth speak of time as we do. We spend time and invest time and need time and lose time and save time and waste time and find time and buy time and gain time and want time. And, in the end, time, not life, threatens to absorb us.

Time, the American assumes, is for doing something, for producing things, for achieving goals. And in our commitment to pragmatism and effectiveness, we far too often fail to realize that life is really about becoming a person of merit and worth. It might be useful to take a moment each day to give more serious consideration to what we are becoming rather than to what we are doing as time goes by.

**– from *The Sacred In-Between* by Joan Chittister (Twenty-Third Publications)**