

Homily – 16th Sunday of Year B – July 22nd 2018

This past week, (on Wednesday) my mother celebrated her 90th birthday. She's had dementia for a while now and she often forgets the names of some of her kids. But every day is a gift to have her. And every year on my mom's birthday, I give her something special. This year, I gave her a very expensive gift – a “stay-cation” – a “staycation” (with one of my sisters) - the costly gift of TIME – spent together at home. There was nothing to do – except to be together. And even though she wasn't all that “with it” at times (and kept asking the same questions over and over) – it was a beautiful blessing to “take time” to simply be together.

Coincidentally, that's exactly what Jesus says we should do on a fairly regular basis (in today's Gospel) “come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.”

When we came together last Sunday for Mass – we heard how Jesus sent his apostles out to work “two by two” to bring His Good News of repentance and healing and hope to others. That was the job (the work, the mission) they had to do. Now, a week later, we're back to learn what happened next. And we discover that the apostles came back “reporting” all that they had done – in Jesus' Name. So, Jesus tells them to do what many of us try to do, especially at this time of the year – but often don't succeed. What Jesus said could be summed up in 2 words: “TAKE TIME” or “GET AWAY.”

But you know, when *rest* becomes a luxury and *solitude* becomes something extraordinary, it's time for “Spiritual First Aid.” Rest and solitude are hallmarks – of a balanced life. Their absence suggests – we've lost our way (a bit?). Instead of integrating the different dimensions of our lives, we can allow ourselves to be driven by our schedules; shackled by our calendars; and controlled by the myriad demands upon our time. So then, we're no longer “free” in the truest sense. We're at the mercy of every item on our never-ending “To-Do” list. Stress, anxiety and exhaustion are constant companions. And when we attempt to take time off – guilt sets in. There's no virtue (whatsoever) in working – without taking time: to rest; to reflect; to play; and to have some fun in life.

The time for vacation isn't after our batteries run down – but while there is still energy, balance, and good sense – to take therapeutic time off. And the time to spend with our loved one and friends – is while they are with us here on earth. In the short run, “workaholics” may appear to be successful – but in the long run its self-defeating. No one on his or her deathbed has ever been heard to say – “I wish I spent more time in the office.”

We get a very simple message in today's Gospel: “get away to a different place and get a restful perspective. People were coming and going in great numbers. Jesus and his colleagues had very little time (and room) – for themselves – even to eat. So, Jesus had the good, healthy sense to recognize – that they needed to take time to get away to take a break. Without his intervention, the Apostles might have continued until their energy was completely spent.

But what does taking a break (or time away) have to do with religion? The fact is – “taking time away” may be more “religious” than working. Days off, picnics, weekends and vacations. can be profoundly religious events in human life. “Not by bread alone does man live – and, not by work alone does man exist.” On the contrary, human nature is most fully human when it is free: to play, to think, to reflect, to talk, to celebrate, and to profoundly – enjoy.

There are some cultures that actually “build” the work day around the afternoon “siesta” – thereby ensuring that all workers have a daily time of renewal. But other cultures, like our own American culture, no longer value the idea of authentic recreation and/or “keeping Sunday.” Instead, everyone is constantly “busy,” caught up in an endless cycle of “things” to be accomplished. Instead of being a gift, TIME becomes an oppressive force leaving little opportunity for our souls to catch up with our constantly running feet.

So where does all this leave us with Jesus? Well, if you notice, Jesus wanted a rest in today's Gospel, but didn't get it right away. He looked at the crowd, and saw that they needed Him. They appeared to Him to be "sheep without out a shepherd." So He sacrificed "rest" (at that moment) in order to serve the people's needs. Sometimes, we're called upon to do that (especially parents). The crowds in today's Gospel tracked down Jesus and his disciples while they tried to escape by boat for some "R&R." That large group hastened on foot and arrived even before Jesus. And this was well before social media and GPS. There will always be people trying to "track us down." We have to be discerning about allowing every single need to be instantly distracted by.

But notice that Jesus didn't abandon the idea of "rest" altogether. He did get way this time, even if it wasn't too long. On numerous other occasions, He went to a quiet place to rest and pray (into the desert; or falling asleep in the boat; or visiting the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus, etc., etc.).

What place, does real REST have in your life? I say "REAL" rest, because there's a difference between true "resting," and (on the other hand) – "escaping." You can "escape" into endless computer games; a surplus of sleep; or hours of empty television watching. But those things usually aren't truly "refreshing," "renewing" or "life-giving. A family member who I was with this past week – with my mom – watched TV almost the whole time.

Real rest – *enlivens* both body and mind, as well as the soul. It makes us willing and able (and perhaps even eager) to resume our jobs – rather than groaning "back to the grind." In fact, real rest is so important that God didn't just "recommend" it, He commanded it. It's the Third Commandment.

The Gospel challenge today *seems* pretty easy ("come away and rest for a while"). Jesus isn't telling us to turn the other cheek; / to go the extra mile; / or even to take up our cross and follow Him. But, maybe He's saying something that is equally as challenging. He invited his disciples to "come away" and re-connect to be renewed in spirit – with others.

There's a cartoon in this week's bulletin on page 17 that I'd like to say sums up this homily. It's St. Peter at the gates of heaven checking in a newly arrived aspirant. St. Peter, standing behind a pulpit is looking at the book and he says to the fellow – "Actually, you've had a pretty great life. But you were looking down at your phone – and you missed it. Wow. Isn't that the truth? How much of life do we miss because we're so preoccupied elsewhere?"

I hope next year for my mom 91st she's here in decent health and still remembers who I am. Every day is a gift.

And Jesus, the Good Shepherd, tells us today – don't forget to come and celebrate the moments we have together (a vacation, a "stay-cation" or whatever - together). He wants to lead us beside restful waters to refresh our souls [Psalm 23]." So, let us pray that we will heed his advice and "Come away by yourselves and rest a while."



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