

Homily for the 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time

July 18, 2021

Last week we heard our Lord sending out His apostles for the first time on their own, without Him, on their first missionary journey; to call people to repentance, to cast out demons, and to anoint the sick. Now we hear of their return.

The twelve told Jesus what they had done. They were probably both exhilarated and exhausted. But things were not letting up. All around them people were coming and going so that they had no time even to eat. So, our Lord said to them: "*Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.*"

What beautiful words. An invitation to step out of all the hustle and bustle of life and to rest. We all need rest. Time for sleep and for leisure.

But I think the Gospel is also addressing another kind of rest. A time and place away from our daily duties and distractions in order to find rest for our souls. Of seeking sacred time with God. This is the reason God instituted a day of rest. For the Jews the Sabbath Day – which literally means “rest” – for us the Lord’s Day, Sunday.

Our world is a hectic place. There are so many things making demands upon our time. And modern technology has put us only a ding away from whoever wants our attention.

It can cause an imbalance in our lives. Lots of activity but little meaningful time with family or with God.

A traveler in Papua New Guinea once described how his guides and porters would sometimes sit down on the trail and refuse to go any further without a rest. They explained “We must give our souls a chance to catch up with our bodies.”

To be with God in a meaningful way we need to regularly step away from our busyness. To give our souls a chance to catch up with our bodies. We need to *make* time for daily prayer and spiritual reading, and for weekly worship. To make this happen we must also observe those words posted on theatre screens before a movie and, “Please turn off your mobile devices.”

Ironically, as our Lord took His apostles away in a boat to find a deserted place for some rest, when they approached the shore, they were met by a great crowd that had followed them by land. Goodbye quiet time!

But maybe not. Maybe that “deserted place” they were looking for was their time on the lake with Jesus? If anyone has been on a sailboat or out fishing on a lake you realize just how peaceful and relaxing it can be. How it can psychologically distance you for a while from your daily cares.

We do not know how long Jesus and the apostles were on the lake but however long it was it became their time of rest, their place of quiet

contemplation, their prayer time. And we, like them, must grab some time with God whenever and wherever we can find it in the midst of life's daily demands.

Cardinal Schönborn of Vienna said that his spiritual father used to tell him, "You must pray interiorly even at the train station or on the subway" (*The Joy of Being a Priest: Following the Curé of Ars*, p. 89).

So, when Jesus and the apostles did finally reach the shore and the crowd was there to meet them, our Lord did not look upon them as interrupting His plans. Rather, He looked upon them with compassion, because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and He began teaching them. For the faithful life is an interrupted life.

Commenting on today's Gospel passage the Scottish biblical teacher, William Barclay, wrote: "The rhythm of the Christian life is the alternate meeting with God in the secret place and serving people in the market place" (*The Gospel of Mark*, p. 157).

The rhythm of the Christian life is this ebb and flow: stepping back from the fast pace at which our lives operate and putting ourselves in the presence of God; then returning to our involvement in the world, but now renewed in spirit.

In his 2018 Apostolic Exhortation, *Gaudete et exsultate* ("On the Call to Holiness in Today's World"), Pope Francis said: "We are called to be contemplatives even in the midst of action, and to grow in holiness by responsibly and generously carrying out our proper mission" (no. 26).

So today we take this time to be together with the Lord, to step back from the world for a while, to take our sabbath rest, to contemplate our life in Christ, to pray and worship. Afterward we shall return to the world outside to serve God and our neighbour hopefully with hearts renewed.