

## **July 18, 2021**

Jer 23:1-6; Eph 2:13-18; Mk 6:30-34

*Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.* Jesus says this to his Apostles after they have returned from a period of active and fruitful ministry. But what is the rest he speaks of? What is this an important thing for them to do? And importantly: What does this directive say to us today?

We all recognize the value of rest. We have days off, vacations, holidays. We do this in recognition of the fact that as humans we can only keep going so long. First we become physically tired and less efficient in doing things we get less done in the time we have and are more uncomfortable doing it. Secondly, we become less virtuous in our behaviors, less focused on the good things. We tend to be more apt to be unkind to others, more likely to have emotional swings with our mood or temper, more prone to be dissatisfied with our life and situation. We may turn to alcohol, drugs, or sex as ways of “relieving stress” - a stress that we have, in reality, created for ourselves.

When we don't rest, we have less time for loved ones, we may actually wind up wasting a large amount of time in things that don't get us closer to our goals, and we have less to give others in relationship. However, we can't forget the damage that such a focus on activity causes to our relationship with God as well. For some strange reason, we tend to think that this relationship with God is the more dispensable one. We think that if we can cultivate relationships that will bring us earthly success, if we can tend to family and friends, and get people to like us, then we are done. However, it is by the neglect of the relationship with God that all the other things can easily unwind - or at least be much less satisfying than they could be.

Jesus gives a powerful example many times of both a tireless work for the good of others, and also a specific attention to giving time to God. When the Apostles come back today he sends them to a deserted place to rest. To rest in a human sense, yes - but following his example - as a time to also refresh the relationship with God. Many times Jesus will do this. Go off by himself and pray. A time of rest, and a time of spiritual enrichment. The thing that makes Christian rest different than others is the fact that we rest not just as something for ourselves - not just to recharge your batteries, but also to restore your spiritual balance. This combination opens one to

the power of the Holy Spirit, deepens the relationship with the Father, and prepares one not just to be relaxed for self and your goals, but also energized for service to others. This is a rest and purpose that is like no other - one that we are built for on a deep level.

Jesus comes to bring us the completion of our lives as Humans. We are called to a life of discipleship - not of self-advancement. To a life of service to others - not to a life of maximizing our personal pleasures. To a life of relationship with God - both directly in prayer and also finding God through our relationships with others. When we refresh ourselves to care for our bodies and minds, when we do so for the good of preparing to be good disciples, when we include an attention to the voice of the Holy Spirit and a deepening love for God - then we are refreshed in a new way. It is a refreshment and spiritual balance that you have to experience to believe - and one that prepared us for the full completion of our ultimate destiny. St. Paul tells us in the second reading: *He came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near, for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.* This is about access to the Father on earth - and union with the Father in heaven - made possible by Jesus.

We go to that deserted place that Jesus speaks of for true refreshment that gives us an access to the love of the Father. That deserted place may be found in a yearly retreat, a day of reflection, by pausing for specific times in the day to pray and meditate. I find that the amount of effort I place in my daily prayer is about equal to the amount of balance I have in dealing with life's difficulties, and in feeling inwardly satisfied. But this private prayer is not the only way to spiritually recharge. When we gather for Mass or activities of prayer and study things of God with one another we also enter a "deserted place" - a place deserted by the foolishness of the world, a place deserted by those who do not wish to follow God's ways. In the Gospel Jesus says *Come away by yourselves* ... in the plural ... as a group. Let's make this Mass a time where we enter a place deserted by the concerns, politics, and fighting of the world - a place where we can encounter Jesus and refresh ourselves in body, mind, and spirit. As we open ourselves, and surrender our cares to God, let us prepare for the refreshment that can come in the Eucharist to those who are open to it. A refreshment that increases a hunger to spend more time (in small pockets through the week) with the Lord in prayer. A refreshment that draws us to serve others in love, and to strive for the ultimate union with God that is our fullest completion.