

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time – 2021 (Year B)

One of the things I have always liked about the Gospel passage we just heard is the way it shines a light on Jesus' humanity. The Jesus we see in this story is one who seems to be just like us. He's tired. Life is getting way too hectic.

And the people around him seem to be getting more and more demanding every day. And he needs a break. He needs to get away from all the stress of life and just relax. And so he (and his apostles) go off to a deserted place to rest.

Don't you feel that way from time to time? I know I do. Some days I just want to get away and experience some peace and quiet. Nothing on the schedule. No one demanding anything from me. No questions that have to be answered or parish fires that need to be put out or e-mails that must be answered immediately.

But about the crowd --- all those people following him from one place to another --- even when he's trying to get away from them. Why were they chasing Jesus all over the place? Why would they refuse to let him sneak away from them for a little rest and relaxation? What were they after? What were they seeking?

Maybe part of their interest in Jesus was simply curiosity. They heard about Jesus from someone else, heard about some of the things he said or did, and they just wanted to see for themselves --- see what all the hubbub was about. Some of them might even have been trying to catch Jesus saying something he shouldn't so they could go back to the authorities and maybe get Jesus in some kind of trouble.

Our clue comes from the mouth of Jesus when he says, “*. . . for they were like sheep without a shepherd; . . .*”

Jesus could tell that these were people who were a little lost, people who needed a little guidance, people who needed someone to care for them and watch out for them.

There must have been something missing in their lives, some sort of emptiness or need that was not getting met. Their lives were almost certainly filled with toil and hardship and uncertainty (like nearly all people in the ancient world) and therefore seemed to not be heading in any particular direction.

They needed hope. They needed to experience something or someone who could make their lives better, give them a kind of meaning. And this man Jesus seems to have touched them in some way -- so much so that they didn't want to let him out of their sights.

One of the biggest differences between us and them, however, is that we live in much different times. The world they grew up in didn't provide them with many opportunities, many options. People didn't sit around thinking about what they would like to "do" with their lives.

They didn't get up in the morning thinking about how they might spend their day or spend their money. Every day (except the Sabbath) was exactly the same --- over and over and over again. No choices. No options. But also, no distractions.

Ours are much different. Most of us engage in all sorts of activities that change from day-to-day, week-to-week. And if we don't like our job, we think about getting a different one. And if we don't like our house or the town we live in, we move. And when we have some free time we have hundreds of options to choose from.

And yet, we have that same basic need that they had --- the need to fill an emptiness, a longing, which can only be filled in one way --- by our God. If only we knew where to find him. If only we knew how to pick out his voice from among many. If only we knew that choosing any other path other than the one he is trying to lead us down will be unsatisfying, unrewarding, un-life-giving.

I can't give you a simple answer as to how that can and/or will happen for you. Each of our journeys is different even though the destination is the same. But it will never happen if we don't at least try, if we don't at least admit and acknowledge our deepest longings and needs --- our profound dependency on our God who loves us beyond measure.

And so, let's do our best this week and not get pulled in a hundred different directions. Rather, like the crowd in the story, let's do our best to not let Jesus out of our sight.