

Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year “A”

There is an old German proverb that states, “When I rest, I rust.” Implicitly, this proverb suggests that the best way to avoid rust or age is to work, work, work—and keep moving. And among us there are no doubt some who subscribe to this mentality as much as we resist days off and do not entertain the thought of a vacation. And yet, a life without sufficient rest is not only a busy and exhausting one but an unrealistic and unhealthy one as well. The Book of Genesis, in fact, recounts that even God when creating the world took a day off for “on the 7th. day he rested.”

Rest is an integral part of the cycle of life. For the swimmer, no matter how efficient the stroke unless there is a regular time when the arms and legs can rest, there is the risk of exhaustion. For the traveler journeying across country it is essential that he stop periodically at a rest stop. And for the devoted Christian amid all the service—there must necessarily be rest—so says Jesus in today’s Gospel.

Two times Jesus uses the word rest to issue a promise. He says, “Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light.”

Essentially, Jesus invites us to rest in Him and to learn from Him in as much as He knows how to walk that balancing act between work and rest.

It is important to note that Jesus’ words of love and his words, miracles, and healings were all rooted in a healthy sense of rest. This rest was not so much sleep. Actually it was something much more restful and deep. The rest spoken of by Jesus involves three key components.

First, solitude. The Gospels recount many instances in which Jesus climbed the mountain and or fled into the desert to be alone. Jesus, however, was not alone in the lonely sense—but rather in solitude. And time and again that solitude became a fountain of creativity and vitality. If we want to know rest in the true sense, we need to find solitude away and apart from others. These places of solitude do not always have to be the mountain or desert—but they are our car, bathroom, or our bedroom. Wherever we feel alone, there is always the opportunity to develop solitude.

The second component of spiritual rest is silence. Jesus uttered many words in His ministry, but there were also moments of silence. And in that silence there was an attentive listening to the Father. Jesus spoke to the Father—but he also listened and allowed the script to develop according to the Lord’s plan. If we want to know rest in the true sense, we need to be silent. That means we need to turn off the T.V., pull the plug on the radio, put the cell phone on silence and exit the computer. When was the last time we drove in the car without the radio or sat in our family room without the T.V. on or spent a few hours away from the phone in total silence? You know when we walk away from the self-imposed noises of life—we not only begin to hear better but we rest better.

The third component of spiritual rest is stillness. It’s one thing to be silent—and it is a whole other thing to be silent and still. Jesus knew how to be in solitude and – to be silent and to be still. Jesus even praised stillness when he rebuked Martha who was busy with deeds of hospitality while his mother sat still and listened attentively.

In the stillness of His life – Jesus came to know His role. If we want to know true rest we need to be still. There’s a beautiful line in the psalms that states, “Be still and know that I am God.” In our stillness we come to know not only who we are but whose we are. And in that stillness we can give it all to God. And what is more, we can come to enjoy true and lasting rest.

And so as we plan our vacations and rest periods, let us not forget Jesus who says, “Come to me those of you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest.”