

## ORDINARY TIME SIXTEENTH SUNDAY YEAR B 2009 HOMILY

(Jeremiah 23: 1-6; Ephesians 2: 13-18; Mark 6: 30-34)

### CHRIST'S RYTHM

I can remember the days before the interstate highway system. We are talking ancient history here! It was certainly different getting around then. I recall our frequent trips as a family to the Marietta area where our grandparents lived. It took forever to get there from Columbus via route 40 to Zanesville and then route 60 along the Muskingum River. But occasionally we also took a little vacation to visit my favorite uncle and aunt who lived in Cleveland. This was the big time in the 1950s! I loved Cleveland, which was so much bigger than Columbus then, and there was a lot to do there. I was especially fond of going to Indians games – and they actually won games in those years! Cleveland was a truly cosmopolitan experience. They were even on a different time than Columbus since the northern part of Ohio went on Daylight Savings Time then in the summers while we in the central and south did not put our clocks ahead.

But getting there without the freeways was a chore. We had a 1947 Dodge club coupe with fluid drive (a kind of primitive automatic transmission). There were six of us, including my baby brother, and air conditioning in cars did not exist for most people – including the Klinger's. I can't remember the exact routes we took to Cleveland, but I know we mostly followed Route 3, the so-called "Three C Highway" which still goes from Cincinnati through Columbus and on to Cleveland. Of course, this road went through Westerville (right out there), which was about the place when my parents heard the first "are we there yet?" I don't recall that Dad ever said "don't make me stop the car" (it wasn't his style), but he and Mom got plenty upset with us kids because we were always bickering about something – or getting sick. I was especially prone to car sickness. Later in my adult years, I did some research and discovered that Dramamine existed by the 1950s, but my parents apparently didn't know this. Bathroom breaks were unforgettable because the state-operated rest stops were glorified outhouses in those days. Believe it or not, I was pretty comfortable with out-houses because we had to use one when I was really little before we moved to Columbus. But the younger of my siblings were appalled at outhouses and made a big deal about the oppression of having to use them. Lunch breaks were also memorable – mostly because they took forever since Dad was so cheap we had to find the crummiest restaurant in town.

But you know what? These trips to Cleveland were really fun – even for Mom and Dad. We eventually arrived at my uncle's and aunt's – somewhere close to the time that one of us asked for the 100<sup>th</sup> time "are we there yet?" I credit these road adventures, absurd as they were, to my love of travel to this day.

In this Sunday's Gospel (from St. Mark), we have one of many scriptural indications that Jesus had the need for rest and "vacation" just like all of us human beings. In this reading, his apostles have returned from a mission and Jesus knows they are tired and in need of food and refreshment. So he tells them to come with him to an out of the way place for some time off. Unfortunately, the crowds were eager to be with Jesus who was increasingly popular and they got wind of where he and his disciples were headed – and they got to that place on foot before the Lord and his group could get there by sea. When Jesus

disembarks, he has compassion for the crowds because to him they seemed “like sheep without a shepherd” (as the reading says) and so he postponed his rest and began to teach the masses. This is the context where Jesus will feed the 5,000 which will be the subject of next Sunday’s Gospel.

This gospel shows us what we might call the “rhythm of the Christian life.” Just as we need sleep in order to work and it is work that makes us ready for sleep, so we Christians need the rhythm of prayer and service. We need to rest in the Lord so that we have the spiritual strength and energy to serve him in our neighbor. And this service is part and parcel of our workaday world if we have the right attitude and dedicate all our life’s activity to the greater glory of God. Of course, caring for the family is a huge part of the holy activity of the Christian. But it is vital that prayer and refreshment in God’s presence be a daily duty in our lives so that we have the rest we need to do the work of God.

As with everything in the spiritual journey, there are two extremes to be avoided as we follow the rhythm of the Christian life. The one extreme is that we never or rarely pray. We may be willing to do good works and we may even be good at it (or think we are); but unless we take the time for prayer, our zeal for service will wane. Part of the problem here is that our job can consume us and we end up not only not praying but also not serving our families or our parish and community very well either. Not too long ago, some Catholics (including priests) were fond of saying: “my work is my prayer.” This is a foolish way of thinking that deludes us into believing we don’t need time with God alone in prayer. Blessed Mother Theresa once wrote: “Pray for me that I do not loosen my grip on the hand of Jesus, even under the guise of ministering to the poor.”

The other extreme is, of course, that we rarely or never serve. We may be great at prayer – both the public prayer like the Mass and private prayer like our favorite devotions. But these practices are sterile unless they move us to be in touch with our neighbors who are in need. We can go so far as to be annoyed when a family member or friend has interrupted our devotional rhythm. Even monks and nuns, whose vocation is to pray, have work to do and they follow a beautiful rhythm of prayer and work. I am reminded of something St. Vincent de Paul (1580-1660) said to the Sisters of Charity (of whom he was the co-founder): “Do not feel upset or feel guilty because you interrupted your prayer to serve the poor. God is not neglected if you leave him for such service ...; remember that this very service is performed for God. Charity is certainly greater than any rule. [Charity] is a noble mistress [and] we must do whatever she commands... Outcasts and beggars ... have been given to us as our masters and patrons.” These words of St. Vincent de Paul return our thoughts to the gospel today where Jesus and his disciples had their rest and prayer delayed by the needs of the crowds. And this may happen to us if it happened to Christ. And we need to go with the flow! But as Mother Theresa reminds us above, we have to eventually return to spending time with God in prayer. There we will find the shepherd of our souls, Jesus, who had such compassion on the crowds in today’s gospel because they were in need of shepherding.

Jesus never experienced a trip to Cleveland in a small car along old roads with a frazzled family. However, he had his days where he needed rest and couldn’t get it. But just as we eventually reached our destination in the City on the Lake and had a fabulous time, so Jesus was able to return to the rhythm of prayer and service where he derived power from his Father to do his work on earth. May we,

as individuals and families, follow his example and find our own rhythm of spiritual rest and work so that the divine shepherd who takes care of us can move us to Christ-like compassion for others and bring us all to eternal life!