

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time • B
July 18-19, 2009
Christ the King

Last week, Jesus sent out his disciples on mission,
today they return to give an account of their efforts.

In their rendering, Jesus tells them they all need a break.
“Come by yourselves to an out-of-the-way place and rest a little,” he tells them.
But when they get there, it’s not such an out-of-the-way place after all;
because the people they need a rest from have arrived ahead of them.

I suspect that, if it had been possible in first-century Palestine,
the apostles might have urged Jesus to invest
in an answering machine with a phone menu.
“You have reached the offices of Jesus of Nazareth and Associates.
The office is now closed so they can rest.
But your call is very important to us.
Please leave a message.

To request a blessing, press 1.
For information about the kingdom of God, press 2.
To hear the Beatitudes, press 3.”
And so on.

Like Jesus and his apostles, we are sometimes hounded by claims on our
time and energy. I am reminded of the song by Alabama that says, “I’m in a
hurry to get things done, I rush and I rush until life’s no fun.” Life seems to
be moving faster and faster. 24/7 no longer seems to be enough....

Friends want or need us,
work and civic obligations crowd our daily schedule,
and family matters get complicated.
And where does God fit in?
Now, we know that it is possible to paint these things
as more burdensome than they really are.
Then we end of feeling sorry for ourselves simply for having
to deal with normal reality.
We also realize that there are some things that we think
are obligations that really aren’t.

So, let’s think about resting.
Jesus, the Good Shepherd, as part of his disciple-training program,
invites his disciples to come away with him and rest.

But as we heard, they didn't get to rest.

Jesus looked at the crowd and saw that they truly needed him,
so he sacrificed rest in order to serve the needs of the people.
Sometimes we are called upon to do that too.

But Jesus didn't abandon the idea of rest.

On numerous other occasions, he went to a quiet place to rest and pray.

This away-time, this time of peace and prayer, quiet and rest,
this time of re-creation is as necessary as breathing.

Without it, the demands and challenges of Christian service
and commitment can choke and stifle even the best intentions.

Without it, even the most energetic and enthusiastic person
can lose his or her center.

It is so important to the whole of life to find and maintain our center in God.

St. Francis DeSales once wrote:

“If the heart wanders or is distracted,
bring it back quite gently and place it tenderly in God's presence.
And if you do nothing else while at prayer but bring your heart back
again and again and place it in God's presence, ...
though it went away every time...,
your time of prayer would be very well spent”
(*Introduction to the Devout Life*, 1609).

We need to learn the value of rest.

Think of the beginning musician who has not learned that it is precisely
the musical rest in that score that unifies the whole piece of music
into a melodic whole.

The rest is nothing in and of itself, just a space,
a silence between sounds.

But that rest is what makes it a musical composition
instead of just a series of connected notes.

The same can be said about our lives.

We need rest, we need that out-of-the-way place,
we need space, space for God.

We need to make time to be quiet and to pray.

Finding, or even making time to rest is hard.

So maybe we can practice here at Mass.

Maybe we can take this time, this space,
where we can rest from our labors and from ourselves.
A time to remember all God had done in creation, in Jesus,
in our lives.
A time to rest with God.
A time to be still and know God.

Our liturgy calls for rest, throughout the Mass.
We are called to rest during the penitential rite,
before the opening prayer,
before the first reading, after the first and second reading,
after the homily
and after all have received Communion.
Let us make sure we take these times.

So let us practice here and now.
Let us make space in our lives for God.
Let us rest and find refreshment.
Let us be still and know God.