

# 16<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

Homily Given by Rev. Mr. Greg Pecore

July 19, 2015

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

Dear Friends,

Do you ever feel like you just have to get away from it all? ...from problems...from the constant demands of living...from deadlines...from the trials of life...from whatever frustrations or emptiness you're going through? Do you just need to find a quiet place to rest and quiet yourself...and restore yourself? We all probably have that need at times because we feel burned out...used up...running on empty. Even though we might still thank God every day and are grateful for all His gifts to us, we still face moments in our lives when our "coping mechanisms" are just not working correctly – we are in need of a jump start, or some major repairs.

Jesus experienced that – maybe somewhat of a burnout. We remember that he was totally human and at times He must have felt like a vending machine – constantly being emptied, needing to be restored. The crowds were always there, pressing in on Him and His apostles. He knew His apostles needed restoration. He told them, "Come away by yourselves to a deserted place...an out-of-the-way place...and rest awhile."

There are times when we recognize this need for balance in life – and there are times when we don't recognize this need. We may forget, or put off, our need for solitude in order to find again that "whisper of God". Sometimes it may be someone who loves us that recognizes that need in us, by the way we are responding to life. Our humanness requires fresh, new perspectives from time to time. Jesus recognized that His apostles were worn out, tired, and possibly very irritable with each other and the crowds that followed them.

I found a true story by a Catholic nun, Sr. Jose (joe-z) Hobday, entitled "Solitude". She wrote a story about her early life that relates to this situation. She writes,

"Many years ago, when I was in my teens and living out west, I had been feeling out of sorts for quite some time, and to add to my irritations, I had learned that my best friend, Juanita, who was to visit me from another city, couldn't make it. I was fretting and complaining and generally making a nuisance of myself. In fact, day after day, I had become increasingly frustrated and obnoxious and was arguing with everyone in our home. Finally, my father said to me, "Get a book, a blanket, a jug of water, some apples, and get into the car!" I wanted to know why, but he only repeated the order...so I obeyed.

My father drove me about eight miles from home to a canyon area and said, "Now, get out! We cannot stand you any longer at home! You aren't fit to live with. Just stay out here by yourself today until you understand better how to act. I'll come back for you this evening." I couldn't believe he'd do this to me, but I got out, angry, frustrated and defiant. The nerve of him!

I thought immediately of walking home; eight miles was no distance at all for me, for I was accustomed to hiking alone through these canyons. Then the thought of meeting my father when I got there took hold, and I changed my mind. I cried and threw the book, apples, and blanket over the canyon ledge. I had been dumped and I was furious. But it's hard to keep up a good, rebellious cry with no audience so finally, there was nothing to do but face up to the day alone. I sat on the rim, kicking the dirt and trying to get control of myself.

After a couple of hours, as noon approached, I began to get hungry. I located the apples in the valley below and climbed down to retrieve them, as well as the book and the blanket. I climbed back up, and as I came over the top, I noticed the pin-yen tree...it was lovely and full. I took a

drink of water, spread the blanket in the shade, put the book under my head, and began to eat an apple. I was aware of a change of attitude. As I looked through the branches into the sky, a great sense of peace and beauty came to me. The clouds sat in still puffs, the blue was endless, and I began to take in their spaciousness. I thought about the way I had acted and why my dad had treated me so harshly. Understanding began to come, and I became more objective about my behavior. I found myself getting in touch with my feelings... with the world around me. Nature was my mother, holding me for comfort and healing. I became aware of being part of it all, and I found myself thinking of God.

I wanted harmony...I wanted to hold the feeling of mystery...I wanted to be a better person. It was a prayerful time...a time of deep silence. I felt in communion with much that I could not know, but to which I was drawn. I had a powerful sense of discovering myself as great, of seeing the world as great, of touching the holy. This sense lasted a long time, perhaps a couple of hours. I found that I liked being alone, enjoyed the rich emptiness, held the stillness. It was as if I had met another person—me—who was not so bad after all. By the time my father came to get me, I was restored. My dad did not press me about the day. He asked no questions and I gave him no answers...but I was different, and we both knew it. My father had “dumped me into solitude” and had challenged me to grow.

Before I got out of the car, I thanked him, and from then on, especially during the summer, I would take a day to go off alone. I loved those times of solitude, of contemplation, of prayer. I loved the person who I was...the world...the God I had met that day. This habit of seeking solitude has stayed with me all these years.”

This is the end of Sr. Jose’s story.... Solitude can be a key for us because God uses it to “unlock” us there. He speaks to us in a gentle whisper. This balance in life – between activity and solitude – needs to be maintained. “Be still and know that I am God.” (Psalm 46:10) restores us. We thank God for the right level of a full life because too much human activity and concerns can lead to emptiness, and then, we are out of balance.

During the past week, after I had prayed, read, and considered the readings for today, I was trying to prepare the first draft for this homily, but my mind and heart was still full of some serious health situations with two of our children...and with the latest Supreme Court decisions...and a few other past decisions that they’ve made. All these concerns had been swirling around inside me, praying constantly for healing and peace for my children...constantly considering the impact the court decisions will have on society and where this country and our Church might be headed.

I wrote the first draft, influenced more on that human behavior, rather than on God behavior and His teachings. My wife, Karen, listened to my homily and recognized this as I read it to her. I appreciated her gentle wisdom. I deleted the draft and started over. Then I found and read the story of Sister Jose, entitled “Solitude”. I heard the tough love of her father, and the wisdom and peace that came to her from being taken to a quiet place...and I also felt at peace.

We can worry and fret over situations, but many times have little or no control over them. Most of the time, we only stir ourselves up and others along with us. We become “news junkies” at times and brood over the constant bad news. In maintaining our balance in life, we need to internalize often the Alcoholics Anonymous Serenity Prayer... “God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”

Our serenity...our solitude...is given new life through God’s Word and the Eucharist. With these, we can better consider what we do have control over and how to respond to certain situations. Throughout Scripture, Jesus repeatedly goes to a quiet place and communes with his Father...and again today, He gently pleads with us: “Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest awhile...maybe under the pin-yen tree.” Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make our hearts like unto thine. Amen.