

## Sixteenth Sunday – July 19, 2015

Not every retreat plan works out the way one hopes – not even for Jesus. No matter how much he would have liked to get away and rest a while with his disciples, the people (in droves) were hungry for what he had. They were hungry for more than the religious leaders of the day were offering them, and they were willing to go to great lengths to find it. They were like sheep without a shepherd. Jesus sees it clearly; his compassion leaps forth; the rest and retreat plan is shelved for another day. The crowds hungered for Jesus and his teaching that day. Who are those people today? It's no secret that the largest religious denomination in the United States is the Roman Catholic Church. We may have good crowds at the liturgy, and we can be proud of our Catholic Charities – including our schools, health care institutions, and our scores of outreach programs. That's all wonderful. But do we know that the second largest “religious” group in the United States consists of people who have left the Catholic Church? Maybe we ought to find ourselves under an imperative. We are all baptized to carry on Jesus' mission, and that includes being shepherds for one another. There are masses of people who remain hungry in every sense of the word. If we are going to follow Jesus and even grow deeper into our relationship with him, two areas of our lives will call out to us. Pay attention to rest and solitude; pay attention to compassion. A word on each call.

Rest and solitude. Magnificent things happen when we embrace this call. Concerns are reevaluated; attitudes are changed; friendships are better understood; fears are examined; the big picture is clarified; new possibilities are discovered; memories take on new meaning; and sometimes faith moves to the center and a slender thread of holiness fills an empty space. In theory, we think that rest and solitude can yield insights, dreams, and possibilities. In practice, we may be all-too-willing to keep filling our lives with noise and clutter.

Compassion. Compassion has no schedule. Vacation or not, people bring their needs to us in countless ways. Some thirst for conversation; others need physical help. Many hunger for advice; they want to discuss some painful or puzzling experience they are laboring through. Many can use a smile, a laugh, a visit, a card – some passing glimpse of grace to shine in the tense course of their colorless days. There are so many hungry people who need to find some witness of faith, hope, and charity in people just like us.

Jesus takes the lead in rest and solitude. Jesus is also unafraid to wade into the river of compassion. We need both.

American poet Ralph Waldo Emerson might have been thinking about today's gospel when he observed: “The task ahead of us is never as great as the Power behind it.”

Some words to take to rest; some words to carry to the river of compassion. (See “Joy of the Gospel”, #78)