

Father O'Connor's Homily for 21 July 2024
Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time-B

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

The ancient Greek storyteller, Aesop, was playing a game with some children. Someone came along and told him that he was wasting his time with such frivolous activity.

Aesop saw an archer in the crowd and asked if he could borrow his bow. Aesop loosened its string and said to his critic: "If this bow is strung all the time, eventually the tension will wear it out. But, by unstringing it in between times, the bow is going to have great tension available to me when I need its strength."

And so it is with our lives. Our days are marked with periods of tension and relaxation, just like the bow. There is a rhythm in life, as Matthew Kelly reminds us. We need time for being wide awake and time for being fast asleep. We need to mark our waking moments with time for prayer, time for work, time for study and time for leisure.

We find this idea in today's Gospel. The apostles had been out preaching and healing the sick. They came back to Jesus "and reported all they had done and taught." Jesus noticed that they were very tired and He said to them: "Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while." Rest is a necessary part of the rhythm of life, and Jesus recognizes this.

"If we don't come apart," one writer says, "then we will come apart!" We need to "come apart" with the Lord regularly. We are doing that right now in this Mass on the Lord's Day. We listen to His Word to us in the Scriptures. We receive His Body and Blood in the Eucharist. We "go in peace" at the end to return to our daily activities with renewed energy.

But we need to "come apart" with the Lord not only on Sundays. Every day needs to be marked with some quiet time with Him in prayer. Today I would like to suggest three places where you, as busy persons, might find an oasis-opportunity to accept the Lord's invitation: "Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while."

Being the oldest of six children, one of the things that marked our days at home when we were small was nap time. [Looking back on this, I think that our naps were far more for my mother's sake than for ours!] I remember that during our nap times we would think of all kinds of excuses to come downstairs and ask my mom a question, like: "How many more minutes until our naps are over?"

But I also remember that when I would come down the steps to the living room, very often I would find my mom praying her rosary or using her prayer book or doing some inspirational reading. That was her quiet time with the Lord, even with all of us kids still in the house.

A number of you travel in your line of work. And with all the down time that goes with business travel – time in the car, in airports, in hotels alone at night after the meetings are over – there are lots of opportunities for personal prayer time with the Lord.

And with all the time that you and I spend in our cars, there are those 10-15 minutes trips that are just right to say the rosary or just talk something over with the Lord. Or maybe for longer trips, listening to an inspirational talk or Christian music might be an oasis-opportunity – rather than simply passing the time with the radio playing.

Most people are great at planning their work and planning their leisure. But lots of people have trouble planning regular time for their prayer. And if left to last place on our list of priorities, it will be the first thing to go.

There is a rhythm to life. That is how God made us. We need time for being wide awake and time for being fast asleep. We need to mark our waking moments with time for prayer, time for work, time for study and time for leisure.

In a world that equates busy-ness with successful-ness, and constant activity with feeling valuable, that brings laptops for work while on vacation, that works more hours a day than people did thirty years ago, that constantly taxis children to events away from home, that takes as its mantra, "I don't have time!" – the invitation of Jesus is more vital and welcome than ever: "Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while."

Let's take the One who made us at His Word.