

16th Sunday OT Year B
July 19, 2015

Come away and rest awhile.

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

The phrase “Blue Laws” may not mean much to people today, especially if you are younger than 45 years old. But for those old enough to remember, you may have had to make a mad dash to the corner grocery store on Saturday evening to pick up a gallon of milk before closing time. Why? Because if you didn’t, you had to wait until Monday– the store was closed on Sunday. The blue laws regulated whom could be open or closed on Sundays. The only such laws remaining now deal with car sales and liquor sales on Sundays.

While visiting Jerusalem as a seminarian, I vividly recall once when out of nowhere, someone threw a rock at the window. You see, the restaurant had remained open after the beginning of the Sabbath and the locals were showing their displeasure, to say the least. But it made me think, I’ll tell you. Today it seems as if it is incredibly easy to fall into an attitude about work and busyness that leaves little or no room for simply doing little or nothing. “Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest awhile.”

"How are things going?" "Oh, pretty busy, I guess" is often the automatic response– given without even thinking. It is like a relentless spur we use to urge each other on, eerily reminiscent of the old Cold War promise of “mutually assured destruction”: if we all stay busy - none of us will notice what's actually happening to us. Or do we really like being too busy? Is busyness the great escape from emotional engagement with the rest of our lives? The ancient Latin poet Ovid may have got it right: “You who seek an end of love, love will yield to business: be busy and you will be safe.”¹

¹ Ovid, *Remedia Amoris* I.143 (43BC- 17 A.D.) “qui finem quaeris amoris, Cedit amor rebus: res age, tutus eris.

In other words, if you stay busy enough, you'll be protected from the demands of love. Plenty of people have echoed that sentiment. Perhaps it is time to take stock and ask ourselves why all this rushing, all this pressure, all this busyness? Have we reached the point of believing that we are indispensable?² Or if not, perhaps we are merely overburdened and cannot seem to ever get caught up?

How can we possibly hear the voice of God amidst a cacophony of sounds and a constant flurry of activity? In truth, we cannot! Our prayer life will quickly dry up, having been lost in the midst of other activities, however noble those activities may be.

Similarly, if we never take some time away from our daily routine, both our physical and spiritual lives will suffer. Granted, some people may not be able to get away on a vacation for any number of reasons, some related to work or finances or cares regarding the needs of loved ones. In this country, almost one in four Americans has no paid vacation (23 percent) or holidays. In these cases it is still imperative to take time for rest, as the body cannot function well day after day without sufficient rest. There are some countries in Africa and Asia that do not offer regular two-day weekends, but some do not even allow one day off per week.³

In our first reading from the prophet Jeremiah, the shepherds were scolded for scattering their sheep, and not caring properly for them. Thus, it will be the Lord himself who steps in to make sure that the sheep are properly cared for. So it should come as no surprise when Jesus was moved to pity at the vast crowd in today's Gospel, for they were like sheep without a shepherd. [The Lord is my shepherd; in verdant pastures he gives me repose.] The beautiful words from Psalm 23 echo the same sentiment.

² Hugh MacKay, "Busy? Mind your own busyness?" (Australian sociologist).

³ Thailand, Uganda, North Korea, Nepal and Mexico as examples.

God's action is the model for human action. The CCC states: "If God rested and was refreshed on the seventh day, man too ought to rest and should let others, especially the poor, be refreshed...It is a day of protest against the servitude of work and the worship of money."⁴ So, both in our work and in our rest, let us give praise and glory to God, shepherd of our souls.

⁴ Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph #2172.