

Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
July 3, 2011

We hear Jesus today tell his followers to take a break: "Come to me, all you who are weary and find life burdensome, and I will refresh you. Take my yoke upon your shoulders and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart. Your souls will find rest, for my yoke is easy and my burden light."

Jesus never minced words about the sins of the church people of his day. But of all their sins, the one that seemed to rankle him most of all was the fact that the religious leaders had taken away precious rest and peace from people's lives. They told the people that in order to have religious meaning, in order to be somebody, they slavishly had to observe the details of 613 commandments. The heaviest burden that ordinary people had to carry was their religion.

The religious leaders had even twisted the meaning of their most sacred day, the Sabbath. Ordinary folk were forbidden to perform even ordinary acts of charity for those in need. The Sabbath law had become so perversely interpreted that if a fly landed on your nose, you were forbidden to swoop it off. The church leaders of Jesus' day had robbed the people of the rest and peace that the Sabbath was supposed to offer the weary.

Jesus knew that the Sabbath was meant as a reminder that even when God took a day off from work, the world didn't fall apart. God rested on the seventh day and invited all those who were weary also to rest and to know that there is more to life than work and worry, routine and restlessness.

That's why down at Ocean Shores our new archbishop, Peter Sartain, shared with priests a brief reflection by a pastoral counselor: "Simple, clear, direct thinking born of the silence within the heart will keep your soul in God. Taking care of others will drain a pastor's strength. What is lost is compassion for his own soul. How can he pretend to love the Spirit, when his own receives so little care? A pastor's life is spread so thin. What is lost is depth. Go deep, not thin."

Originally the Sabbath was looked upon like the exodus itself, which freed the people and refreshed them with new life. Like the exodus, the Sabbath was the great equalizer of all, great and small, masters and servants, people and animals who were invited to the godlike activity of being at peace.

That is why Jesus fought so hard to restore this original meaning of the Sabbath. He, who was gentle and humble of heart, put it clearly: "You were not made for the Sabbath, the Sabbath was made for you!" I think all of us need a brand-new appreciation of the Sabbath in our lives. We live in a time where new burdens rob us of the peace of God.

We live in a world filled with gadgets designed to make life easier, but we spend so much time and energy buying these gadgets and then more time and energy finding a place to store them. Even such a simple task as buying groceries has become a burden. In a recent cartoon, Hilary complains to her mother, Sally Forth, that going to the supermarket isn't fun anymore because Sally has to spend too much time fussing with her coupons and checking out the fat and cholesterol content of every item she buys. Even the simple pleasures of recreation have brought new burdens: the right sneakers, the most expensive equipment, the sure-bet putter. People these days often return from their summer vacations more weary than before they left.

It seems that the more efficient, smart and progressive our society becomes, the more burdens we have to tote around and the less time we have for ourselves, for our loved ones, and for our God.

Our gospel invites us today to cast aside those burdens that are robbing us of our peace and begin to rest our restless hearts in God's. In the words of Archbishop Sartain, "What is lost is depth. Go deep, not thin."

Paul A. Magnano
Pastor