

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)

July 22, 2012

Jesus knew about our human need to take time off and to rest our aching bodies and refresh our wearied spirits. In today's gospel story Jesus tells his apostles that they need some R&R. His apostles had just come back from their first missionary trip. It is true they were excited about all they had seen and done, but Jesus knew they were also tired and needed a little time off. Preaching, teaching, and healing are rewarding but also draining.

Mark tells us that despite Jesus' best intentions to provide a mini-vacation for his apostles, the crowds didn't even allow Jesus and his companions a chance to get a bite to eat. Jesus was not very successful as a tour guide. His plan to outfox the crowds by taking his friends on a boat trip to a deserted place failed when the crowds beat them to it by arriving ahead of them on foot.

This final act by the people touched the heart of Jesus. He looked at them with compassion. They reminded him of sheep without a shepherd. He forgot about vacation time and began to feed them with his words. After his words he fed them a banquet of loaves and fishes. This lovely story captures the human tension of the need to get away from it all and our need to respond to the demands of love that is commitment.

Many years ago in June, a parishioner in Skagit gave me a little gift to take with me to Priest Days at Ocean Shores. It was Anne Morrow Lindbergh's *A Gift from the Sea*. The book has become a classic reflection on our need to get away from it all and our need to respond to the demands of love that is commitment. In a reflection on the moon shell, Lindbergh writes:

Solitude, says the moon shell. Every person, especially every woman, should be alone sometime during the year, some part of each week, and each day. How revolutionary that sounds and how impossible of attainment.

The author ends her chapter on the moon shell with a decision to take it back to Connecticut and put it on her desk as a reminder of her need for solitude and rest. She says to the moon shell:

You will remind me that unless I keep the island-quality intact somewhere within me, I will have little to give my husband, my children, my friends or the world at large.

Anne Morrow Lindbergh knew the demands and the trials of love. She was married to an aviation hero. She was the mother of a kidnapped and murdered child. She and her husband were always mobbed by crowds. But the gift that she received from the sea gave her the inner strength to live in compassion toward the people of her life. She was able to feed her family and friends with words and food because she had learned the secret of the moon shell.

In a way, her book is like the gospel story from Mark we heard today. Jesus protects his apostles and himself with rest and solitude in order to feed the people with words and food. If you are still planning your summer vacation make sure you take time out for yourself to rest. Maybe even think of taking with you the book *A Gift from the Sea*, or even the Gospel of Mark.

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