

The Paper Pulpit

(Reflections from the Pastor)

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time

In today's Gospel, we hear about Jesus withdrawing to a deserted place. By Jesus' example, we see that prayer comes first. Before we act, before we speak, we should pray. A certain pastor asks his parishioners to spend twenty minutes a day in prayer. It may not seem like a lot. I know people - busy people - with children at home, a job, the works, who set aside time for prayer, an hour or more each day. But twenty minutes is a good start for many people today. It's the amount of time needed to say a rosary or to slowly read a passage from the Gospels. A person could easily spend twenty minutes reading, stopping to reflect on one or another phrase, and thinking about your own children, grandchildren, nephews and nieces, other young people you know. Maybe there is a particular young person who is troubled, seems almost lost.

Prayer opens our lives to a power, an immensity. I would like to illustrate this with a comparison: A news story tells about four men adrift on the Atlantic Ocean near the equator. They became so thirsty they tried to squeeze moisture from the pieces of canvas on their lifeboat. When rescuers finally arrived, the men lay prostrate from dehydration. After reviving them, the rescuers informed the men of an incredible irony. While they were fighting for a few drops of water, they had actually been floating on potable water! They were near the Amazon River; a river so huge that it pushes fresh water far out into the ocean (The Amazon is immense: a greater volume than the next eight rivers combined). The men could have dipped a bucket off the side of their boat and drawn out drinkable water.

People today resemble those men; thirsty, but unaware of a readily accessible source of water. Pope Benedict spoke about this at World Youth Day 2008. Addressing a half million young people in Australia, he said, "In so many of our societies, side by side with material prosperity, a spiritual desert is spreading; an interior emptiness, an unnamed fear, a quiet sense of despair. How many of our contemporaries have built broken and empty cisterns in a desperate search for meaning...?"

Speaking to the young people, Pope Benedict identified the things we are thirsting for: love that endures, opportunity to share gifts, unity based on truth, communion that respects the freedom of the other person. You can sum this up by saying that we long for three things: goodness, beauty and truth. But, said the Holy Father, instead of goodness, beauty and truth, what our society offers is choice, novelty and subjective experience. Those things are not bad in and of themselves, but to stop there is like squeezing water out of canvas when we are floating on an immensity of drinkable water.

And what is that ocean of living water? The pope answers in a single word: Jesus. Only by Jesus will we find the goodness, beauty and truth we desire. Only He can give love that endures, freedom that respects each person. Jesus withdrew to a deserted place, but He saw the crowd and had compassion for them. He then does something beautiful. Jesus takes the bread, blesses it, breaks it and gives it to the disciples to distribute. The evangelist notes, "They all ate and were satisfied." Isaiah says, "All you who are thirsty, come to the water!" And in the Psalm you and I spoke these words of gratitude to God: "You open your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing."

Come to the water. God wants to give a gift that will satisfy us, a gift that will change us. By way of conclusion, I would like to quote Pope Benedict's invitation to young people: "God's love can only unleash its power when he is allowed to change us from within. We have to let it break through the hard crust of our indifference... our blind conformity to the spirit of this age. Only then can we let it ignite our imagination and shape our deepest desires." Come to Jesus. Come to the water.

Jesus invites us to withdraw to a deserted place. Make a novena of prayer for our young people and resolve to set aside at least twenty minutes each day for prayer. You will open yourself to a power, an immensity: Jesus himself. Amen.

Parish Feast Day and Feast of the Assumption: On Thursday, August 14th is the Feast of St. Maximilian Kolbe and Friday, August 15th is the Feast of the Assumption – A Holy Day of Obligation. Come join us for a special Mass on Wednesday evening at 5:30 to celebrate our feast day (and the Holy Day) and then tentatively share a spaghetti supper at the St. Patrick's Church. All are invited. The cost is free. We will tentatively be serving spaghetti and all the fixings. There will be activities for kids as well. So, let's come and celebrate our parish feast day, the holy day and have supper together. No need to pre-register but we'd like to have an idea of how much food to prepare. If you know you are coming for sure, add your name to the sign-up sheet as you enter church. If you are not sure, please, please come. It will be a great evening.

Looking for a boat motor: The first Apostles were fishermen; I have followed in their footsteps. I love to fish. About ten years ago, I made what I think is the best \$1,000 purchase I ever made. I bought a 14' Chrestliner boat with a 35hp motor. The \$1,000 included the trailer. It's old, a 1987, but it worked well. I have made some improvements over the years. It's small, which I like. I can fit three people easily. I have taken a number of parishioners out fishing over the years and many times this summer. Unfortunately, I hit a rock on the Wisconsin River last week and damaged the motor beyond repair. I really like the boat, so I am looking for a newer motor. If you have a 30-35 hp motor you'd like to sell, please let me know. If I cannot find a motor, I might be interested in buying a different boat. I prefer a 14' but open to other options. Call me at 824-3380, email me at frjim@stmaxkolbe.org or see me in person.

Sincerely in Christ, Fr. Jim Trempe