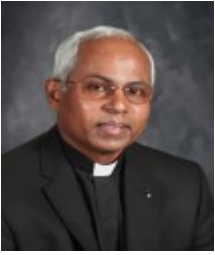


A Letter From Father Francis



My Dear Friends in Christ,

We are very much in the vacation season. We all need a break from our routine, whatever that routine might be. Most of the time we go on vacation with somebody, or we go away to stay with somebody. Most of us like to be with others when we are

away from our routine. In the gospel we find Jesus taking his disciples away together for a period of rest and quiet. They had a busy time and were full of all they had done and taught and wanted to share it all with Jesus. He suggests a change of pace and of location, to take them away to a quiet place, where they could rest. This was to be a time of reflection in the company of Jesus, a time when they did nothing except be present to each other and to the Lord.

In our own faith life, we all need such desert moments, times when we try to be present to the Lord and to each other. We have prayer groups in our parish that meet; it is a desert moment; they can be a short period when people sit in silence having listened to a short talk. We have other prayer groups that meet when a group of people gather around the gospel and listen to it in silence for about thirty minutes, and then share a little about how it has spoken to them. These are times when people are present to the Lord and each other in a more intense way than is usually the case. They are little desert moments that people can share, times when we can come away to rest for a while in the Lord's presence and the presence of other believers.

Our church here is open every day. **Our church is that sort of desert space in the middle of our community**. It is a place to which people can come away and rest for a while, in the words of the gospel. The silence can be an opportunity to share with the Lord what has been going on in our lives, just as in the gospel the disciples shared with Jesus all they had been doing and teaching. Other people can have that desert moment by going for a walk. As we walk we can become aware of the Lord and his presence to us, and we can become more aware of people in our lives, even though we may be walking alone. Though we do it, as believers, as followers of the Lord, we all need to come away to some lonely place all by ourselves and rest for a while so as to allow the Lord to be in a deeper communion with us.

If the first part of the gospel proclaims the value of coming away from our everyday cares, to be present to the Lord, the second part proclaims another value. The lonely place suddenly became a crowded place, even before Jesus and his disciples had reached the place. Jesus and his disciples stepped out of the boat not into quietness and peace but into human need

and demand. We are all familiar with that kind of experience. We plan something and it doesn't work out. We go somewhere expecting something and the opposite transpires. We want to be alone and we are flooded with people. Jesus and his disciples experienced a major interruption to what they were intending. Disruptions are part of all our lives, and as one writer put it, God is often to be found in the interruptions. Jesus responded to the interruption by becoming completely present to it. He did not try to avoid the crowd or to send them away; he became fully present to them. In the words of the gospel, 'he took pity on them', 'he had compassion for them.' That is very much at the heart of our own calling as the Lord's followers, to be present to others, even when they turn up unexpectedly and interrupt what we had carefully planned. It is so easy to get worked up and irritated when something happens that is not part of the script we had in our head. We can be so fixed on that script that we can look at people as nuisances instead of being present to them with the compassion of Jesus. Jesus had the habit of spending time alone with God; it was those times of presence to God in prayer that enabled him to be present to others, no matter who they were or how they turned up. Our own coming away to be with the Lord will help us too to be present to those who come into our lives. Our meditative moments, **our desert times**, help us to be reflective, attentive, in our way of relating to those who cross our path in life.

See you at Mass!
Father Francis

P.S. Thank you to all the Grandparents that joined us for a wonderful brunch last Sunday. It was so great to see everyone enjoy themselves.

