

Eighth Sunday of Ordinary Time (A)

It was at the beginning of February that I went on retreat. I had not been on a retreat for several years, even though the Church, in her wisdom, wants clergy to make a retreat every year. I went to South Dakota, because there was a retreat center there called Broom Tree that had been highly recommended by several people I knew. Here are some particulars of the retreat.

It was nearly a week long, one was assigned a spiritual director that you met with twice a day and the retreat was completely silent (other than participating in daily Mass, and meeting with your director.) I had never been on a silent retreat before and I didn't know how it would go for me. I should mention that the main theme of the Broom Tree retreat center is, "In the Silence, God Speaks." On Sunday night, the day the retreat began, we were given instruction on schedules, Ignatian spirituality, reminded that silence meant silence and that all cell phones were to be turned off for the entire retreat. I thought to myself, I can do this and yet when I shut off my phone on Sunday night I had strange feeling. You see, when you shut your phone off you not only cut off your ability to talk to your loved ones, but you in many ways check out of the world. No email, no text messages, no news, no checking my bank account, no calendar of things to come, the weather, no Amazon, you name it; gone. It was me alone with God, for an entire week. I can honestly tell you that it was a life changing experience for me. I loved every minute. When I finally turned my phone back on and was heading home I found that all was well, I was rested, at peace and found that I had encountered the Lord in a profound way.

As I read the readings for today I couldn't help but think of my experience at the retreat center. I felt God's intense love for me when I was there and that is reflected in the first reading. Also, I couldn't help but see a connection between my living in the world and the things that I value, or the things that are mammon to me, and how they pull me away from God. My cell phone was that connection to so much of that. Let me clarify, do I value email, text messages, phone calls, news, calendars etc. I would like to say no, but being honest I feel that I do. As I try to put a word or meaning to what I am trying to say I guess I value my time, my time spent gathering information, looking ahead, satisfying my wants for things, my connection to people, my ability to get work done, my need to plan, to be in control. Finally, what I realized when I simply turned off my phone was that many of the things I wanted it for, or felt that I needed it for, caused me anxiety. I can't describe to you how peaceful I felt when I shut off the phone. I didn't hear or read one single news story, not one, yet the world is still here. I wasn't agitated by any political speeches, I didn't think about what was coming, I was with the Lord, just him, giving him all of my attention and experiencing his presence and love. I believe as Christians that should be first and foremost for us.

I know we can't simply check out of the world. We are called to be in the world and do the work of God. But there are some really important things that we can do in our lives to equip ourselves to live the life that Christ wants to us live. Many of us have families to raise, jobs to go to, family celebrations to attend, so many good things. In addition, there are people that are depending on us. There are those we know who are sick and who we need to care for, those who need our support. We have illness to contend with and suffering. We must attend to these things. But as Jesus said to the apostles, "come away with me for awhile to rest". We need to rest, but to rest in Him. How many of us do that?

You don't have to go to a retreat center to spend quiet time with the Lord. Find a place in your own homes to be with him in silence, just you and him. Give him your day. Unplug a little from the world, the cell phone etc. Start your day not checking your emails or the news, but read the

gospel for the upcoming day and listen to God speaking to you. End your day in silence and prayer. Be aware of his presence. Make Christ your focal point, gaze on Him and ask for the grace to trust.

“Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides. Do not worry about tomorrow: tomorrow will take care of itself.” As we now approach Lent, I can’t think of any better advice.