

July 22, 2018

16th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Earlier this month The whole world watched with great with great joy to see 12 members the soccer team of young boys in Thailand were rescued with their 25-year-old coach after being trapped in a cave by an unexpected flash flood. How were they able to survive in total darkness with no food and little water and then also survive the rescue under nearly impossible conditions even for professional navy SEALs all parts of the word? Meditation. Meditation literally save the lives of the boys and their coach. The coach, Ekapol Chantawong, was able to teach the boys to remain calm and to prepare for the extremely dangerous rescue through meditation. He was once a novice Buddhist monk and still meditates daily.

Here is another recent story in the news about the importance of meditation. Internet addiction is a new challenge for many people in our modern age of social media. People can easily spend hours that they never intended to do on social media. I fall into it as well. I can tell myself that I am going to spend only five or ten minutes looking at Facebook, and I look at the clock and I have spent a half hour. For some, it is many hours every day. Meditation can help people to move from unintentional use of the internet to an intentional use, a use that has meaning and purpose. They are guided through a breathing exercises to calm the mind, to center themselves. After 15 minutes of meditation, they are then told to calmly picture up their mobile device and to first think of their intention for going to the internet and to stay focused on that intention, and remain on that purpose without distraction.

These stories are great examples of how prayer and especially meditation can help us to face what would seem to be impossible situations and to keep our lives focused without distraction.

For the Christian, meditation is much more than focusing on our own inner tranquility. Meditation leads us to Jesus, the Shepherd of our souls, the Son of God, who dwells deep within us. Meditation is a profound, personal encounter with the Lord. This encounter with the Lord “is necessary for the spiritual life, just as the planting of seed is necessary for bodily life” (Sermon by Saint Lawrence of Brindisi, priest).

In Mark's Gospel today, Jesus invites the disciple to come to a deserted place to rest for a while. What helps you to rest a while with the Lord? What gets in the way? It can be all too easy for us to let the business of life get in the way of spending even a short time with the Lord. Obviously in the Gospel today, the time of rest shorter with the Lord was shorter than planned because the crowd, that was like sheep without a shepherd, caught up with them. Even if we give a short time to total silence with the Lord, even five minutes a day, God is always ready for us, always there to help us. During my retreat last week, I came across this quote from Meister Eckhart: "God is always at home. It is we who have gone out for a walk."

Jesus and the disciples probably walked to the deserted place in the Gospel. Have you ever taken a walk with the Lord? As I walk or jog or bicycle, it is amazing how many people are glued to their device and not aware of their surroundings. As I bike, often despite my repeated warnings, they have no idea that I am approaching from behind and am attempting to pass them. A walk with the Lord, whether is physically or mentally, will actually open us up to see as Jesus sees and hear as he hears, to be attentive to the sights and sounds around us, to the people who are next to us. To be not so focused on ourselves rather to be more aware of who and what is around us. I would like to for a few moments, guide you on a meditation. Close your eyes, place your feet flat on the floor and straighten your back Breathe deeply and slowly. As you breathe in, say "Jesus Son of the living God," and as you breathe out say, "Have mercy on me." Practice that for 3-5 minutes and notice what a difference it makes in your life.

To walk in silence with Jesus is to be a mystic because as Sr. Thelma Hall writes, "To see every woman and every man as sister and brother is to participate in the faith vision of the mystic, whose central intuition is to the unity and oneness of ALL." ("Too Deep for Words, Rediscovering Lectio Divina" p. 55).

As the 20th century theologian Karl Rahner once said, "The Christian of the future will be a mystic or he will be no Christian at all."