

July 22, 2008 16th Sunday in ordinary time

Once there was a blonde who was really sick of all the blonde jokes, she decided to die her hair and change her hairstyle. After her new makeover she decided to drive to the countryside. She happened upon a shepherd with a large herd of sheep. She stopped and talked with him at length. Finally, she asked him, "If I guess the total number of sheep can I have one?" "Yes," the Shepherd replied. With that the young lady correctly guessed 382. The Shepherd was amazed and kept his word. After she had picked her sheep to take home and was trying to get in the car, the Shepherd asked. "If I can guess your real hair color can I have my dog back?"

Last week we saw that Jesus's apostles were sent out on a mission to preach the good news, to heal the sick and to drive out demons. Today we see in the gospel that they have completed that first missionary journey. And after being with him a long time, under his tutelage and guidance, now they return to report their progress. We know from other evangelists that the moment of reunion after you've been sent out on a mission is full of rejoicing and energy. They had experienced the power of God working through them, moving people's hearts to their words and deeds. And how does Christ respond? He says, "Let's go rest so that we can be in quiet for a little bit." The lesson here was very clear but it's hard to put into practice. Active apostles, Christians who are energetically engaged in evangelizing the world need to balance their activity with quiet time and contemplation. Time spent in personal conversation with the Lord, i.e. prayer. Sometimes we wonder why we get so emotionally and spiritually run down. It's because we are not recharging our spiritual batteries. If we don't we charge our spiritual batteries, our physical batteries don't get recharged either. Stress, discouragement, other crippling emotions can wear us out if we are not daily and reinforcing our faith in Jesus Christ. Only our friendship with Christ can supply us with the strength and wisdom we need to be truly successful in the roles we play otherwise known as vocations or jobs. But also in who we are, really are beneath these roles. Without prayer, study and time alone with God our well will soon run dry, we will have nothing to offer others. But, without action without giving freely to others what we have received freely from God our spiritual waters will be stagnant, lifeless like a pond with no entrance or exit, it just sits there. Contemplation and action; prayer and work such as Christ's way is the way of every Christian. This is true for spiritual life but it's also a principle of human nature in general. As human beings we are two; body and mind, flesh and spirit. Everything we do has a material aspect; work, effort, action and the spiritual aspect; planning, vision, long-term goals. We think of a football team. Football players are experts in action; fast action, hard-hitting action, speed, power and dexterity. I'm sorry, "American football." I have to clarify that now. But, when a football team comes on the field, how does it organize and direct it's physical activity? By following the game plan, a strategy, a vision for victory. For every minute on the field during a game the team invests hours and hours of practice to hone their physical skills, film analysis, discussion and strategic thinking. It helps them merge together as a team. It helps them see what the other team is all about and it helps them figure out ways to try and hopefully win the victory from the enemy. That's what keeps them united, focused and motivated during the heat of competition. They know why they are here and the challenges they'll be facing and the path to take to come out victorious. Sometimes the faster bigger team loses because the other team had a better game plan, a better vision and executed it better. It's interesting, after watching the movie *The Replacements* with Keanu Reeves (a cousin of Reajean, our DRE, I found out last night), he was talking about how physically able these football players were. He was playing a quarterback of a replacement team that took over for the Washington Sentinels during the strike, the replacements crossed the line. He said that when he was

first getting to know the role and the game, they used real players on the field. He said he'd go, "Hike" and he'd try to hand the ball over and the running back was already down the field. He was so fast, so powerful. Keanu said it took them days and days, a couple weeks to be able to get as good as those football players, because that's how much skill they had built up over time perfecting their physical condition. Well the same thing can happen in our spiritual life. Every day we're battling temptations, difficulties and obstacles to fulfilling our role as Christians. It's easier for us to get worn down and discombobulated. That's a good word by the way, discombobulated. But if we spend time with the Lord in prayer, if we meet regularly with the Holy Spirit, (our head coach and personal trainer by the way), we'll be able to win these battles. In prayer our faith vision is renewed, our injuries are healed, our weaknesses are strengthened and our victory is assured. Pope Benedict, in 2009 said, "One who prays is not afraid, one who prays is never alone, one who prays is saved." So you can't underestimate the value of prayer. Sometimes people will tell me, "Father, I feel so helpless just praying." And yet that is the most powerful thing we can do because we are in direct conversation, direct contact with God, when we are praying.

St. Benedict of Nursia, in the 300s, he was the father of western monasticism, founding of monasteries. He used a model in his rule that sums up our lesson very well. He said, "Ora et labora." Ora is Latin for pray. Labora is Latin for work. Prayer and work, not either/or, but both/and. These are two sides of one coin for each of us. We are called to be close friends with Jesus Christ, each one of us. We can only do that if we develop our prayer life. But we're also called to be fellow soldiers, ambassadors and agents. When I was confirmed, showing my age, the bishop would slap you on the face before he confirmed you. To make you tough, to remind you that you had to be tough to fight the battle of evil. We are fellow soldiers and we're agents of God in his kingdom, and putting our time, talents, creativity and energy into doing things that will make this world a better place.

As we continue with the mass praying from our hearts, receiving the bread of life that will strengthen us for this coming week's work and battles, we should ask ourselves an important question. Have I found the right balance between prayer and work? Or am I off balance. Some Catholics only pray when they come to mass on Sunday and don't think about God the rest of the week. Other Catholics are in the chapel so much, they don't fulfill their family or work duties. Some Catholics like to leave all the, "kingdom building" to missionaries, religious, priests, bishops. This isn't so because we are all called by virtue of our baptism to do that. Other Catholics are constantly trying force-feed the gospel, the Bible down people's throats. I knew a guy in the seminary, the second one I went to, Brother John, he carried three books with him at all times. When he traveled to the airport, to the bus station, no matter where he was he would pull out the books and start preaching to people. Telling them about this and about that. That's not what Catholics do, we do it mostly by action. People in airports don't need someone else trying to stop them from getting where they're going. We have enough with TSA. Each one of us because of Jesus saying, "Let's rest," we need to find a balance in our lives, in our life circumstances. Once we find that balance then we can be healthy, whole people but also healthy, whole Christians, followers of Christ.

God bless you.