

A priest colleague known for his loving, generous and kind nature, would often quip – when off on another jaunt – that his going away on a break was both a gift to himself and to his parishioners. It was truly spiritual self-care and not a selfish act. I know his renewed spirit on his return was a blessing to all. Mind you, his remarking to the bishop, when he fell asleep as the Bishop preached – that it was a sign of how relaxed he was in his company – may have been a step too far in self-care!

The gaze of the Lord, like in today's Gospel, is never neutral or cold and calculating – it is always warm and empathetic. No matter how strong and zealous we are, exhaustion can strike. Rest seems to be the antidote and yet very few actually do rest well ... which seems strange. We had an enforced 'rest', in a way, with Covid restrictions. This was no harm for our little country, and for the church, on the merry go round of busyness. I have always been struck by people who say to me (and everyone, I presume) 'How are you ... busy as usual I suppose?' They seem to suggest that by being busy, my life has some meaning.



I read somewhere that the writer, politician and political economist John Stuart Mill, in his autobiography, wrote movingly of his father. His dad recognised the gifted nature of his son and proceeded to cram his head with all sorts of knowledge – but he had no faith. So the father would not allow anything religious to become part of his son's education. You can almost feel the deep sense of loss when J.S. Mill wrote that his mind was stuffed with information, but his soul was starved. 'I was left at the commencement of my voyage (of life) with a well-equipped ship – but no sail.'

Mills' experience was the reverse story of the early Irish Monks who would set sail on their mission journeys in small boats or currachs without oars. In effect, they gave up their small vessel to the wind and sea, letting these elements fulfil God's will and decide their destination. In that way they converted Europe. Maybe we need to be less full of ourselves, lift up our sails and let God direct. He only asks us to 'come away' – to a 'deserted place' (in life) – all 'by yourselves' and finally 'rest awhile'. The prescription is still valid for our times as the medicine for our souls. Will we have the humility and wisdom to take it?

– Fr Tom Cox

Reflection

Where is your desert – that place of rest, where God speaks to your heart? In which ways is Jesus your shepherd?

Lesson

Like the good shepherd in the prophecy of Ezekiel (Ez 34:11-16), Jesus feels compassion for people and begins to teach them.

Prayer

Lord, have compassion for your people this day. Guide us in the time of trial and lead us safely through the darkness of error.



WALKING ALONGSIDE OR AWAY?

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, experienced rejection: many 'walked with him no longer'. This offers us some consolation when, despite doing our best to pass on our faith in Jesus and his Church to our children, we, their 'shepherds', experience them drifting away from the faith. God loves our children unconditionally, and we need to continually 'hold them' in our love.

– Marriage Matters

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This Week (19–25 July)

- 19 M St Macrina the Younger, religious
- 20 T St Appollinaris, bishop and martyr
- 21 W St Lawrence of Brindisi, priest and doctor
- 22 T St Mary Magdalene
- 23 F St Bridget of Sweden, Patron of Europe
- 24 S St Sharbel Makhlof; St Declan, bishop
- 25 S SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME