

Mark 6: 30-34, 53-end

As we begin to emerge from the lock-downs of the past 18 months, it is natural to feel anxious, and some may feel stressed about how this may work out over the next few months, with cases rising. This is on top of a world that many people already experience as **stressful**. Communications are so fast now that there seems little time to think or to reflect. All the troubles of the world come instantly into our homes through our TV, radio, internet, and phones, as if we hadn't got enough troubles of our own! Many find this difficult to cope with.

We see in today's gospel reading a very attractive picture of Jesus in the midst of great pressures, busyness and demands. Let's see what we may learn from him. The **twelve** apostles had just returned after being sent out in pairs by Jesus, on their first missions. It had been a busy time for them and they needed time to reflect on this new experience. *v31a 'He said to them, 'Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.'* Jesus also understands our lives today, and we can learn so much from his example here. He invites us, as he invited those disciples, in the busyness of life, to come to him and rest awhile.

v30 'The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught.' Jesus makes **time to listen** to them. Amongst all the other pressing concerns and demands Jesus makes time for them, to listen to their stories. Jesus always has time for **us too**. How easily time for one another gets squeezed out of our lives, which has been made more difficult by the restrictions of the past year. We get so busy doing and coping, that time to stop and listen to another becomes a luxury, and yet it is what so many crave more than ever, to be listened to, to be heard.

v31b 'For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat.'

Jesus cares for the welfare of the twelve, for rest, refreshment, recuperation.

There is a hint here as to how we can learn to cope with all the stresses life brings:

To make sure we take time for rest and refreshment for our bodies, minds and souls.

This includes **taking time out to be with Jesus**. On a **daily** basis to make this the foundation and root of our lives, to draw sustenance from the wells of God's Spirit, day by day. And on a **weekly** basis coming away with other disciples to be with Jesus, coming to church, to worship, pray, listen to God, be nourished in communion and fellowship, and speak with God about our needs and our lives.

Summer time can also provide different opportunities to be refreshed, maybe a change of scenery, to enjoy more of the beauty of God's creation, perhaps to walk, to sit in a garden, to read, to reflect, to pray, to be refreshed, to let our souls recuperate. This is not automatic. People can go on holidays and come back more exhausted than when they went! Someone said, *'The voice of love is gentle and quiet'*, so we need stillness to be able to hear that voice and receive that love.

That famous verse from Psalm 46, *'Be still and know that I am God'*, often comes to mind.

That verse was actually written about warfare, *'stop fighting'* it is saying.

We might say, let all that anxious struggle that goes on in our minds be stilled, and let us turn our attention to our Creator.

Jesus did this himself, setting us an **example**. eg. *Mark 1:35 'In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.'*

Jesus made time to be still, to pray, to take time out for himself and his heavenly Father.

I'm not suggesting this is always easy. Jesus didn't find it so. *v32-33 'And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them.'*

Jesus tried to get the twelve away from the crowds for a time, but the crowds followed him. *v34 'As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.'*

Jesus' heart goes out to the crowds, so he takes time to be with them and to teach them.

Later, as Jesus and the disciples crossed the lake of Galilee, we see there is still no escaping, *v54-56 'When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the market-places, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.'*

We see here why the ordinary people flocked to Jesus. He always made time for them.

He felt for their needs. He longed for them to understand God's love for them, God's way of salvation, and to experience the eternal life that he came to bring. He feels the same for us. Jesus is always there for us, just as he was in Galilee, always willing to listen, to speak with us, to touch our lives, that we might grow in wholeness.

Do we give him a chance, by giving him our attention, making time for him day by day?

The desert Father, **Macarius**, mid 4th cent, '*When prayer goes out of our lives, the light goes out of our eyes, and the world is writ large on our faces*'.

Let us make time for Jesus in our lives. He alone can help us find the peace of eternal life.