

## **July 19, 2015 The Parish Killer Homily**

Some time ago, a dear friend of mine complained about his then pastor, now deceased, whom he labeled "The Parish Killer". His description of his pastor sounded like the title of a mystery novel! When I asked him for an explanation, he informed me that, since the beginning of his pastorate, many longstanding families had left the parish, and found a home elsewhere. "But why" I asked. He then shared with me a story.

"Recently", he said, "...the pastor, clearly annoyed, had scolded the entire congregation from the pulpit for disturbing him on his day off. "I am not to be bothered on my one day off. Leave me alone. And besides, you can't reach me most of the time because I am staying in my apartment in Latham". On more than one occasion the pastor was short-tempered with parishioners who failed to leave him alone. And, not surprisingly, they were offended. Not a few members of the congregation worked two or three jobs in order to support their families!

Obviously, the Pastor (Shepherd) failed to set a good example for his people. Let us consider the model shepherd, Jesus. In today's gospel reading (Mk.6:30-34), Jesus wishes to be alone with the apostles after the excitement and enthusiasm of the first mission. Exhausted and weary, the small group is in need of rest, of peace and quiet. Jesus appealed to his disciples to "come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while" (Mk.6:31) Fat chance! "When he disembarked and saw the vast crowd, his heart was moved with pity for them"(Mk 6:34).

The evangelist, St. Mark gives us a glimpse into the emotions of Jesus. Our Lord puts his personal needs aside (rest, eating) because of his heartfelt concern for others ("For they were like sheep without a shepherd".) Not a single word of complaint and no sign of irritation from Our Lord. Rather Jesus shows that he is sensitive to the hardships of the people. What about us? Are we approachable? Do we make ourselves available? Do we complain when people in need upset our daily routine?

A story: Dr. Viktor Frankl was a distinguished Viennese Psychiatrist, who studied under the legendary Sigmund Freud. A survivor of the death camp at Auschwitz, he authored many highly praised books. Once, he was wakened at three in the morning by a telephone call from a complete stranger. The caller, a young woman, was nearly hysterical. Without making any sense at all, she spoke for twenty minutes about committing suicide. The good doctor, though very sleepy, listened until the woman completed the conversation. Sometime later, the woman had an opportunity to meet the great man, and she thanked him for saving her life.

Recalling the conversation, Dr. Frankl insisted that he was not particularly helpful since he was too groggy at the time of their conversation to be of any assistance. The woman disagreed. "But the very fact that a great man like you would spend twenty minutes on the phone with a complete stranger like me must mean that I am important in some way and so I decided to go on living", she cried!

A Christian should be prepared to sacrifice his or her time and even rest in the service of the gospel. Adopting a proper attitude of availability will lead us to change our plans cheerfully whenever the good of souls so requires. The twelve apostles learned a valuable lesson that day!

Compassion is one of the most distinctive traits that categorize Jesus throughout the gospels. In a world that so often lacks compassion and mercy, let us all appreciate and follow the example of Our Brother and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Amen!