

16th Sunday
7/21/2024

HIDDEN INVITATIONS

Have you ever been interrupted by something or by someone? Of course you have. Has that ever happened to you at a time when you were tired and needed some rest? Of course it has. Has that ever left you frustrated? Of course it has. Such interruptions are a part of life and as the gospel shares, it was part of Jesus' life. It's not a question of having interruptions but in how we deal with them.

Jesus knew his apostles needed rest, perhaps he did too. No doubt it was disappointing, and perhaps even frustrating, to see the crowds following them when they wanted to be left alone. On the one hand, there was Jesus with his *wants* and on the other, the crowd of people with their *needs*. Jesus saw them as sheep without a shepherd and he would take care of them. He would feed their souls with his teaching and if you read on, you will hear how he fed their bodies as well.

What tipped the balance between what Jesus wanted and what the crowds needed? In one word, it was compassion. The word compassion literally means co-suffering. Jesus had some empathy. Jesus saw them suffering and suffered with him. It says that Jesus was, *moved with pity*. In Hebrew that means a stirring of the gut, something visceral, even a stirring of the womb.

And Jesus wasn't simply being a nice guy. In biblical thought, pity or mercy or compassion isn't simply one attribute of God but the principal attribute. He was sharing God's mercy with them. Jesus realized that their needs were greater than his wants so, *moved with pity*, moved with compassion, he went out of himself to serve their needs. Jesus reached out to them, he made a gift of himself to them, even though he was tired. In short, he loved them. –Ultimately, to say, *I love you*, is to say, *I am willing to suffer for you*. Exhibit A is Jesus on the Cross. That's about as radical as it gets unless you put the resurrection on top of that and then the coming of the Holy Spirit on top of that.

And it doesn't stop there. The ultimate expression of Jesus' self-gift, of his love, is through his Exhibit A, through his Paschal Mystery—the movement from life through death into new life, that he pioneered and in which we all follow. Looking

at us and seeing our own neediness, our own poverty, our own sinfulness, Jesus looked at us, moved with pity and realized that our needs were greater than his wants. Seeing us in our neediness, he lives out those words he teaches us, *thy will be done*. And what Jesus did for the crowds he does for us at every Mass. He shares his word with us. He teaches us. And then he feeds us, not with bread but with himself, the bread of life. After each worthy Communion, we can say with St. Paul, *It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me*. And we can add, who lives in us.

And there's something else that Jesus teaches us, that Jesus gives us and that is an example. In each of our lives there are interruptions; some welcome, some not, some disappointing and some even frustrating. Hidden within those interruptions, disappointments and even frustrations, there can be an invitation. An invitation like Jesus faced, to weigh in a balance our wants and others' needs. An invitation, at least some of the time to be, *moved with pity*, to show some compassion; to reach out to them, to make a gift of ourselves to them, even when we're tired. In short, to love them. And taking it one step further, to see, serve and love Jesus in them.

The story of salvation is a story of interruptions of time and again, God interrupting people's lives. Think of Abraham, Moses, David, the prophets, Mary, Joseph, Peter, Paul, so many others and you and me as well. And those interruptions can in the long run, be part of a plan, a much bigger plan. This calls us to a spirituality of interruption; to ponder how God can be at work in the midst of our interruptions.

Many years ago, I was having dinner with parishioners at another parish, and I asked them how they met.. They explained that they had literally bumped into each other at work. I am romantic enough to think such an interruption might have been part of God's plan. Parents know a lot about interruptions as do children, brothers and sisters, friends, teachers, students, employers and employees, priests and so many others. At times, we may rightly put off what is asked by some interruptions but so often, there can be a hidden invitation there to show compassion and where God can possibly be at work. St. John of the Cross said, *Let all find compassion in you*. Dealing patiently with interruptions is one way we do that.

With lives of intentional faith, may our hearts and minds always be open to the interruptions, the hidden invitations of our lives, to the God of interruptions. With and through his grace, may all find compassion in us.