

Commentary on the Gospel for Mon, Feb 24th 2014

Then the boy's father cried out, "I do believe, help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24)

This evening I made the time to watch the first episode on a DVD of a British mini-series, *The Big Silence*. Five people commit experiencing silence under the guidance of a spiritual director. All five show an initial desire. After a weekend retreat in a Benedictine Abbey, each was asked to find a regular time for silence during the next week. This was a nearly complete failure. Back in the world, their busy lives quickly took over. They were not able to find the time for silence. The following week they began a nine-day silent retreat at a Jesuit retreat center. Without television, radio, telephones or the internet, the first day was not a time of stress relief; it was marked instead by frustrating boredom, loneliness, uneasiness and feelings of a loss of control. The episode ended with one of the retreatants saying in her video diary that she felt like she was at the edge of a cliff and someone was asking her to jump off, and God should be waiting to catch her at the bottom. She just wasn't sure that He would be there.

In today's Gospel, I can easily imagine myself as a questioning member of the crowd or put myself in the role of one of the disciples of Jesus who is lacking in both trust in God and in prayer. In much the same way I can connect with the people in the DVD. We have full work schedules. We have our jobs. We have our human relationships. These fill our days. I am not alone in failing to find time for God. I have always worked in an environment where the comment "I don't know when (s)he has time to sleep" is taken as praise. We discover that we can make due by short-changing certain things at least in the near term. Sleep is not the only thing to suffer; exercise, proper nutrition, family relationships and spirituality seem to be able to take a short term hit. Twenty-eight years ago a physician told me that unless I changed my life, by the time I was 42, I would be divorced, impotent, and dead. Over the years, where crises became apparent, I changed, and where they didn't, I didn't. I just turned 57 and I am still happily married, but I am overweight and I do not have the relationship with God that I really want.

If something matters, we need to regularly make the time. I make the time for work. I learned to make the time for my family. I think about the features of the most important human relationships in my life. Building them required both time and trust. Keeping them as meaningful relationships also requires time and trust. This is what I take away from today's Gospel. I know the moment that I started to show a real interest in the woman who would be my wife was a moment marked with butterflies in my stomach. These were both butterflies of longing and butterflies of worry. Like the father encountering Jesus in today's Gospel, I can identify with the experiences of being drawn in by need while still feeling anxiety.

I pray to You, My Heavenly Father, out of a spiritual yearning. I lead a busy life. My days are filled with professional responsibilities. Although I enjoy much of my work, I recognize that sometimes I use

it as an excuse.

I come to You today with both desires and doubts. I would like to be the person in control. Too often I only recognize the real order in my moments of need. You allowed Your disciples to grow in both faith and prayer. I ask for the courage and strength that You imparted to them.

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