

Commentary on the Gospel for Mon, Nov 3rd 2014

It had been an extremely busy and challenging year and I was looking forward to my annual eight-day retreat. I stacked up the books which I planned to read, selected peaceful music and busied myself in preparation for my time with God. I had recently purchased a new bike so I decided to take it with me.

I should have been more attentive to what happened as I drove from home toward the retreat center because God may have already been trying to get my attention. Glancing into my rearview mirror as I eased onto the interstate I was shocked to see that my bike had slipped out of one strap of my bike rack and was perpendicular to my car, precariously held by only one other strap. If the last strap slipped, my bike would be airborne. I slowed down my car with extreme caution, turned around and carefully drove back home. I removed the bike and was resigned that I would have to use one of the older bikes provided by the retreat center.

Once I arrived and unpacked, I found a bike and rapidly headed down the road, my mind racing at the same speed. Rounding the first bend, I heard the sound of dogs furiously barking. As I turned to determine the source of their furor, I realized that their focus was on me. Two large dogs were bounding toward me barking ferociously. I was on an isolated country road with nowhere to go so (although I knew better) I began to peddle faster until I hit a large patch of loose gravel. The bike slid one way and I skidded in the opposite direction. Once my body came to a stop, I covered my head and waited for the canine onslaught. Tremendous relief washed over me as I heard the dogs' owner calling to them. They halted and turned around moments before reaching me.

With heart pounding I shakily stood up and assessed the damage. There were no broken bones but my arms and legs were badly scraped and my elbow and ankle were throbbing. I steadied the bike and limped back to the retreat center. My grand plan to bike and pray was dashed as I dealt with my aching, bruised body. That was my last ride for the rest of the week.

The next day I told my spiritual director about my accident. I mused: I wonder why this would happen to me on retreat? She responded: A wise Jesuit friend of mine believes that everything that happens on retreat happens for a reason. With a fair amount of skepticism I responded: So God knocked me off my bike? She simply shrugged her shoulders but she seemed to know something I did not yet understand.

As it turned out, in spite of the accident my retreat that year was incredibly deep and profound. I experienced moments with God which were almost indescribable. To this day, I am grateful for the

reflections and emotions I experienced on that retreat. In spite of my injuries or maybe because of them, I slowed down enough to experience God's rejuvenating and life-giving love or as today's responsorial psalm so beautifully states: In you, O Lord, I have found my peace.

It gradually occurred to me that my busyness and preoccupation with planning my retreat had been blocking my ability to lean into and trust God's peace. Today's psalm goes on to read: I busy not myself with great things nor with things too sublime for me.

To this day, whenever I notice that I am over functioning, I try and remind myself about the time when I had a tug of war with God over a bike and God won. I continue to discover that when I have stilled and quieted my soul like a weaned child...I have found my peace.

Let us each gently pray today about any areas of our lives where we are tugging, pushing or blocking God's love and peace. May God win.

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