

Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, Feb 9th 2013

Jesus has sent his disciples out to preach and to work as he himself has been doing, and now that they have returned he wants to spend some resting time with them, certainly to debrief them and to see what they have learned, to answer their questions, and maybe to consider just what form his ministry will take from this point on. But if the disciples need a rest, so might Jesus.

And yet, in spite of this very special moment that he seeks with his specially chosen ones he turns towards the questing crowds...

I see the hunger and yearning these crowds manifest in how the people come and go in great numbers but also in how they quickly follow him to the deserted spot. And Jesus matches their hunger by turning aside from what he himself wants in order to serve and to give himself to them. This is admirable, and we wish that we could have the same selfless zeal for the good of others, but...

I must admit that I really do not grasp the underlying "message" here. Is Jesus calling us to that same zeal, to that same constant and total dedication to the needy that trumps his fatigue and the needs of his disciples? This is certainly attractive, and many have tried this route, but for us to do so without discerning where the Spirit calls each of us is to head pedal-to-the-metal towards burnout and ultimately the inability to do anything at all.

I can even see something of a workaholic tendency in Christ here, although that is probably overstating it. Does the "zeal for your house consumes me" (John 2:13) have any role here?

Or is Jesus turning us aside from certain satisfactions of friendship and even from the deeper and more personal ways in which he wishes to listen to us, to speak to us, and to form us? Hardly, for he does take such moments when he leaves Israel (Mark 7:25, Matthew 15:21) or when he visits Martha and Mary simply as a friend.

Or is there a better way to understand what is happening here, something better to learn? I think so. I just don't believe that I know what it is.

This is only one aspect of Mark's thematically well structured chapter 6, so there is much to balance here. The "right" answer can only come with time and with spending intimate time with Jesus --- which is exactly what the Lord is calling his own to at the beginning of this passage....

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