

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

Dear Parishioners,

In 1989 when I took up my first assignment as a priest at St. Mark's parish in College Park, I was blessed to have as a pastor the late Msgr. Tom Wells. "Tom" was a great mentor and I learned a number of things from him about what it means to be a priest and a pastor. Among the things I learned was that the weekly bulletin can be a very effective instrument of communication on matters of our faith as well as parish events. So every week Tom Wells would write a column for the bulletin and since I've been pastor I've tried to do the same. Mostly I will write something new for each week although sometimes I will print parts of a homily or perhaps an excerpt from something I've read that may be of interest. I hope that you will find these columns helpful to your own spiritual growth. If not, at least they will give you something to read during the homily. Just kidding.

This week I would like to share a few thoughts about Christ's invitation to us in today's Gospel to "Come by yourselves to an out-of-the way place and rest a little."

By virtue of our Baptism, Jesus has called each of us to share in the proclamation of His teachings both by what we say and by what we do in our family lives, our school work and our professional duties. This is not an easy mission, and as anyone who takes it seriously knows, it can be tiring work.

Our Lord of course knows this. In this Gospel passage, when the Apostles come back from their mission, He can see how tired they are. In fact they are overwhelmed by the demands being placed on them. So Jesus says to them: "Come by yourselves to an out-of-the way place and rest a little." Jesus can see that we too get tired and that we too can be overwhelmed by the demands placed on us. So He also says to us: "Come by yourselves to an out-of-the way place and rest a little."

But what exactly does this invitation from Jesus mean? What it means is the Jesus is inviting us to stop our work for a while and to rest. But to rest in a very particular way, that is to rest in His presence. Now the common name for resting in the presence of Christ is meditation or mental prayer. Some lay people are intimidated by the idea of meditating. They think that is something that only priests and nuns do. However, the method of meditating that I want to present to you was designed by St. Francis de Sales specifically for lay people.

Now if we desire to rest in Christ's presence or meditate, we need two things, the time and the right place. Time-to meditate all we really need is about twenty-minutes. As for place, what is needed is a place that is quiet where we will not be disturbed. A church or chapel with a tabernacle is the ideal place because there we can focus our attention on the Real Presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. However, we can also meditate in our own homes or outdoors. As long as it is quiet and we will not be disturbed for twenty minutes.

Okay. We have the time and we've found the right place. Then what? Well there are 5 steps to meditating. **First**-we place ourselves in the presence of the Lord by reminding ourselves that He desires to be close to each of us. We can do this by saying a simple prayer like the Our Father. **Second**-we ask the Holy Spirit to inspire and guide us during our meditation. **Third**-we focus our thoughts on some teaching or incident in the life of Christ. To do this it helps to read a short passage from the Gospel. For example, we could take this Sunday's Gospel reading. We read it through, (reading aloud helps) and think about what is happening and how the people in the passage are relating to one another. Most especially we focus on what Jesus is saying. For example in this passage, how pleased Jesus was that they were sharing His mission. How tired the Apostles must have looked. How kindly He spoke to them, "Come away ... and rest a little."

Fourth - we spend a few moments thinking about what we have read and how it applies to us.

What is Christ saying to me? Is He pleased by the way that I am sharing His mission? Are there things He wants me to rest from? **Finally**-we spend a few moments thinking about whether Christ is calling us to change in some way so that we may share more fully in His mission or enter more fully into His rest. And then we make a practical resolution to make this change with His help.

So you see, meditating is really not very complicated. In fifteen minutes, less time than we waste watching some silly tv show, we could truly lay our burdens down and rest in the presence of Christ. If you don't already practice some form of Christian meditation, I urge you to give it a try. Our Lord guarantees that if we come to Him He will give us rest.

With my prayers,
Fr. Conley