

I spent this past week on retreat at Conception Abbey. My main goal was to pray with the monks. They gather six times every day for prayer, and each service lasts anywhere from 15 to 45 minutes. Their wakeup bell sounds at 5:40 a.m. They are at prayer together at 6. They break about 6:40 for 30 minutes or so, when they go to their rooms and meditate on a passage from the bible; then they go back to the basilica at 7:15 for another 20 or 25 minutes of prayer. After that they eat breakfast in silence. By 8 o'clock they start their work day, and they finally start talking to each other. They have mass before lunch; daytime prayer after lunch, vespers before dinner, and night prayer after dinner. I don't know about you, but my typical day does not go like this.

In today's gospel the apostles had just returned from work. They had cared for the sick and taught the kingdom of God. Jesus was so pleased with the results that he offered them a reward: "Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while." He offered them a mini-retreat, a little time alone with him away from the difficulties of their tasks. It didn't completely work. They went off by themselves, but a large crowd saw them leaving and decided to go along. Jesus put the priorities of the crowd ahead of those of his apostles, and he began to teach again. Perhaps the apostles still got their rest while he took care of business; after all, he thought they needed that the most. Jesus knew the importance of rest. Many times throughout the gospels we find him at prayer with his Father – not teaching, not healing, not on a boat traveling somewhere, just enjoying time by himself, talking with his Father.

Rest is something many of us don't do very well. People work long hours, often giving up time with their family. They bring work home, making it hard to distinguish from play. Even on vacation, we are connected back to the job by cell phones, email and blogs. Resting is so unlike everything else we do in this world, that the scriptures make it a sign of life in the next. Psalm 23 says the shepherd leads the flock beside waters that are "restful"; at funerals we pray, "Grant eternal rest." We will rest in peace at the end of our days, but Jesus thought it was important to do while we are alive as well.

I realize most of you cannot take off a week, go to a monastery, and pray six times a day, but it is important to accept Jesus' invitation, "Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while." Some people start the day with silent prayer before switching on the radio or TV. Others take time on weekends to go to a special place that restores their spirit. Even a good summer vacation can provide the rest we need, as long as we take Jesus along. You may think you don't have time to go away to some deserted place for spiritual rest; you have too many other responsibilities. Maybe. But Jesus never said, "There are more sick people to heal, more confused people to teach. I really don't have time to pray." He never thought the time he spent with his Father was wasted. Instead, it helped him do everything else with the right attitude. He knew the benefits of rest.