

Votive Mass of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Introduction

The story is told of a priest who, years ago, ran afoul of his bishop. It seems that this particular priest preferred a quiet and pleasant life; sadly, he had a reputation for not breaking a ministerial sweat. Nevertheless he imagined himself to be diligent and hard-working. Indeed, his definition of work was expansive. He was working all the time, even whilst watching television.

By and by, this hapless fellow told his bishop he was suffering from “burnout.” Faintly reminiscent of General Patton, the bishop gruffly replied, “There’s got to be a fire before there’s burnout!”

That is not to say that burnout isn’t real; it afflicts people in every walk of life, and, as a rule, people who are burnt out are usually burnt up, that is to say, chronically angry, bitter, and cynical. The harder they work the less they accomplish and they are generous in spreading the blame around.

Come Away and Rest

As a bishop of some 20 years, I’ve seen plenty of both burnout and pseudo-burnout. And not being made of stone, I have to recognize either could easily happen to me. That is why I often resort to the Gospel passage from St. Mark just proclaimed. Earlier Mark recounted how Jesus sent his apostles out on their first mission. Jesus instructed them to preach repentance and invested them with his authority over unclean spirits - his own power to invade and advance against those personifications of evil bent on destroying human beings and hindering God’s plan of salvation. Jesus also told them to undertake their missionary foray without props - except sandals

and a walking stick - but no food, money, or lodging reservations. To each today's reading from Hebrews, 'the great shepherd of the sheep would furnish them all they needed.' Right from the very start, Jesus made it clear that every authentic mission requires of the disciples radical reliance on the 'Name above every other name.'

In today's passage, they return - excited, bustling with enthusiasm. They were experiencing what newly ordained priests refer to as "first fervor". Without saying so explicitly, the Gospel passage implies that this first mission of the disciples was successful; St. Mark writes: "The apostles gathered together with Jesus and reported all they had done and taught." Apparently they had lost no opportunity to engage in the mission Jesus gave them. Apparently, too, they had succeeded in casting out evil spirits and clearly their preaching was effective. St. Mark implies as much when he says that "People were coming and going in such great numbers that they had no opportunity to eat." It seems the apostles were now also sought out 'because they too taught with authority, and not like the scribes.'

I imagine that Jesus must have been pleased. But notice, he didn't immediately send them out again. Rather, he invited them to come away to a deserted place where he could conduct a debriefing session. No doubt Jesus wanted to hear everything: whom they met, cured, and consoled, all they had taught. And do doubt the apostles were happy to tell Jesus all about their maiden voyage as 'missionary disciples'. But notice also, Jesus wanted his disciples not only to talk things over but to rest. When Scripture speaks of resting, it does mean falling asleep in front of the television. It means entering into God's presence, reposing in the peace of God. In a phrase, "rest" means coming away to be with Jesus in prayer.

Prayer Is Essential

This debriefing and prayer session in the desert establishes the pattern for how all the followers of Jesus should relate to the Great Shepherd. Unfortunately, this is the part of the discipleship manual most overlooked. So, at the end of a long day, it is all

too easy for me to head to what I call my “chair of comatosity” instead of for the chapel, where I can share everything with the Lord, all I have taught, all I have done, what worked, what didn’t, ‘what I had done and what I had failed to do’ confident that the Shepherd and Guardian of my soul already knows all this but truly wants to hear it from me, and not for his sake, but for mine.

But I’m not an exception; this is something every follower of Jesus needs: trustful conversation with God and repose in his presence. After all, as St. John Paul II taught, the laity are the primary agents of the New Evangelization, by living faithfully the beautiful but demanding vocation of marriage and family and by bearing witness to Christ in the workplace, difficult as that often is. As the family of the Knights of Columbus we are called to spread the Gospel by the practice of charity, fashioning every day a corporate witness to Christ’s love and constructing a just temporal order based on the dignity of the human person. At the end of the day, you also need to talk things over with the Good Shepherd and like the first disciples to draw fresh strength as Jesus looks with you with love. And as we return to Jesus at day’s end, let us ask the Blessed Mary to accompany us so that with her we may say, “The Lord has done great things for me, holy his Name!”

On Mission Every Day

And it is well for us all to do this. For on the morrow, we are called to go out again to meet some portion of that vast crowd who are rushing around pel-mel from one thing to the next, like sheep without a shepherd. Whether they know it or not, they too are searching for the Great Shepherd of their souls, to love them infinitely, to satisfy the deepest desires of their hearts.

If we encounter them as those who deeply experience Jesus love in prayer and as those who have experience his power of sin and evil in our lives, then Jesus will bless the mission on which he sends us every day. And we too will rejoice to tell him at day’s end “all we have done and all we have taught.” Mary, Star of Evangelization,

pray for us! Our Lady of Guadalupe, pray for us!