

## A Reflection on the 18th Sunday in Ordinary Time

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My Brothers and Sisters of St. Joseph Parish,

During this time of COVID-19 we are publishing a traditional bulletin, so I have decided to post my reflections online so every weekend you will be able to read and meditate on it.

On this **18<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time** in the Gospel we hear about Jesus withdrawing to a deserted place. At significant moments Jesus went apart for intense prayer. By Jesus' example we see that ***prayer comes first***. Before we act, before we speak, we should pray. A certain pastor asks his parishioners to spend twenty minutes a day in prayer. It may not seem like a lot. I know people - busy people, with children at home, a job, the works - who set aside time for prayer, an hour or more each day. But twenty minutes is a good start for many people today. It's the amount of time needed to say a rosary or to slowly read a passage from the Gospels. Think about your own children, grandchildren, nephews and nieces, other young people you know. Maybe there is a particular young person who is troubled, seems almost lost. He - or she - needs your prayer.

Prayer opens our lives to a power, an immensity. I would like illustrate this with a comparison: An old news story tells about four men adrift on the Atlantic Ocean near the equator. They became so thirsty that they tried to squeeze moisture from the pieces of canvas on their small lifeboat. When rescuers finally arrived, the men lay prostrate from dehydration. After gradually reviving them, the rescuers informed the men of an incredible irony: While they were fighting for a few drops of moisture, they had actually been floating on potable water! You see, they were near the Amazon River - a river so huge that it pushes fresh water far out into the ocean. (The Amazon is immense: a greater volume than the next eight rivers combined.) The men could have dipped a bucket off the side of their boat and drawn out drinkable water.



People today resemble the men in that lifeboat - thirsty, but unaware of a readily accessible source of fresh water. Years ago Pope Benedict spoke about this at World Youth Day. Addressing a half million young people in Sydney, Australia, he said: "In so many of our societies, side by side with material prosperity, a spiritual desert is spreading: an interior emptiness, an unnamed fear, a quiet sense of despair. How many of our contemporaries have built broken and empty cisterns in a desperate search for meaning...?"

Speaking to the young people, Pope Benedict identified the things we are thirsting for: love that endures, opportunity to share gifts, unity based on truth, communion that respects the freedom of the other person. You can sum this up by saying that we long for three things: goodness, beauty and truth. But, said the Holy Father, instead of goodness, beauty and truth what our society offers is choice, novelty and subjective experience. Those things are not bad in themselves, but to stop there is like squeezing water out of canvas when we are floating on an immensity of drinkable water.

And what is that ocean of living water? The pope answers in a single word: Jesus. Only by Jesus and his Holy Spirit will we find the goodness, beauty and truth we desire. Only he can give love that endures, freedom that respects each person.

My friends this weekend we see Jesus who withdrew to a deserted place, but he saw the crowd he had compassion for them. He then does something beautiful. Jesus takes the bread, blesses it, breaks it and gives it to the disciples to distribute. The evangelist notes, "They all ate and were satisfied." Isaiah says, "All you who are thirsty, come to the water!" And in the Psalm you and I spoke these words of gratitude to God: "You open your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing."

So, this week Jesus invites us to withdraw to a deserted place. You will open yourself to a power, an immensity: Jesus himself.

Have a Blessed Week!

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