

The Church of Saint Pascal Baylon

Fr. Mike Byron, Pastor: Sunday Homily

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During the midsummer days, when many people try to take some time to relax, it's not too hard for some of us to recall stories of ruined vacations—times that we'd planned quite specifically for fun and refreshment that, for one reason or another, ended up as pretty much the opposite. The beach adventure that got rained out; the car that broke down; the reservations that got lost; the flight that got cancelled; the family reunion that turned hostile; maybe even the weekend up at the Brainerd Lakes several days ago that got blown away by storms. I've heard more than one story just this week from our own parishioners with ruined vacations up there. Those days are so precious, and it seems so unfair when they slip out of our control. But maybe at the same time they can help us by saving us from imagining that we actually control very much.

I think my most ruined vacation happened one summer when I was on break from the seminary. You may recall a couple of weeks ago I mentioned the death of my grandmother. It was the same year, just a few months before, that her husband—my grandfather—died too. He was quite old and dealing with some chronic disabilities, but in the end his death was sudden and unexpected. And it happened one August morning *just* after I had gotten into my car to take a 10-day trip to the West to visit various friends between here and the Rocky Mountains. That was, of course, a long time before cell phones and text messaging and the internet, back in the days when your vacation often meant that you were completely out of contact with anybody for long periods of time.

My first day's drive took me to Bismarck, North Dakota—about eight hours in the car—where I arrived at the home of Fr. Dave Zimmer (native of St. Pascal's). As soon as he opened the door I could tell that he was troubled by the fact that he was going to deliver bad news to me. I think he was afraid I'd be devastated and shocked. I was saddened, but that was about it. And although I'm not very proud of this, when I got on the phone with my parents to learn about the funeral arrangements, I asked them if they thought I should come back home. What I was really saying was, "Hey, I just drove all this way and it's the start of my vacation." Needless to say, the next day I drove eight hours right back to where I began. I wasn't in control of time and events on that occasion, and I'm still not. None of us is. But we *want* to be! And as I quickly came to see, it was far more important to be where it was necessary for me to be, among the people with whom I *had* to be at such a time, than to follow the plan for "vacation." I'm sure there are dozens of stories like that right here among us.

And I suppose that was some of the same sentiment among the apostles on that boat in the Sea of Galilee a long time ago, en route to a promised vacation from all their ministry among the crowds. It was Jesus who had required of them that they come away to a deserted place in order to rest, and eat, and become rejuvenated for the Lord. They were probably delighted to agree. And then, as they approached the shore that was supposed to be quiet and desolate, there they were again in front them: Not only more crowds but the *same people* in the crowds, the very ones from whom they were trying to get a break. It's not hard to imagine what may have been some of their reactions to this scene: Resentment? Anger? Cynicism? Their chance to rest was about to be taken away from them by these relentless, needy pests. Or so it must have seemed.

But in the end that's not really how it turned out. Jesus was true to his promise. It was not the *apostles* who were deprived of their rest. There's no indication that *they* had to do any preaching or teaching or healing on that occasion. Only Jesus had to do any of that, and he felt obliged to do that because of the compassion of his heart. The apostles only had to sit back and watch as their master stepped in to provide. For them, resting

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didn't mean disengagement. It meant recalling why they were doing all this work in the first place, and remembering to whom the mission had always belonged.

In fact, the vacation for the apostles very well could have been a moment for enormous gratitude and satisfaction, knowing that they had done their own work very well. And how could they have known that? By just looking at that very same crowd. Obviously the teaching and the preaching of the apostles had touched something deep in the hearts of the people—*lots* of people. It had awakened in them a desperate longing for God and for wholeness that the apostles themselves couldn't satisfy, and should never have *tried* to satisfy. It's not even clear in this gospel that the crowds knew *themselves* exactly what they were looking for, but somebody had alerted them that Jesus Christ was the one who could provide it. It was the *apostles* who had done that. They were the "somebodies" who had fanned the dull embers of human hearts into full floes of desire for God and salvation. And then it was time for them to get out of the way, to take a rest, and to let Jesus himself move in and satisfy the need. The apostles had done as much as they could and should have done. This was not a ruined vacation for them at all. It was the *best* vacation, in which they could just watch as the Lord himself became the center of attention—which is exactly where the attention belongs.

We are the ones who are called to the same work of touching human hearts by awakening them to the need for God, the need that *we all* carry around in us but don't always recognize. Our task is to do nothing more than point out the truth about our utter dependence upon the Lord to complete what we most long for, what we most need in order to be happy. But that's *all* we do. We prod. We preach. We witness. And then we step back and take a vacation, because *we* are not the ones to answer those deep longings of the human heart. *Jesus* is. And *only* he. And it's only when we lose sight of that that the crowds become a problem, rather than a reward for our efforts. *We* don't have to satisfy them all. Only *God* needs to worry about that.

So the idea of a "ruined vacation" depends a lot on what we imagine a "successful one" looks like. If we are among our loved ones, doing our best to be faithful to our call, whether at work or at rest, whether doing what we'd planned or not following the script at all, then we are enjoying success. To rest means to allow our best efforts to roll over into the arms of Jesus. *He* is the healer of all wounds and the shepherd to all who are lost. Nobody else can or should presume to do that *for* him. Apostles are not God; *we* are not God. We can certainly take some rest in knowing that.