

16 OTB.18; Jer 23:1-6; Eph 2:13-18; Mark 6:30-34; *Life Interrupted*

I came across this story – see if it speaks to your life, too

Once a man went to see a friend of his who was a professor at a large university. However, as they sat talking in the professor's office, *they were continually interrupted by students who came knocking at the door*, seeking the professor's advice about some issue or other. Each time the professor rose from his chair, went to the door, & *dealt with the student's request*.

Eventually the visitor asked the professor,

'How do you manage to get any work done with so many interruptions?'

The professor replied, 'At first I used to resent the interruptions to my work. But one day it suddenly dawned on me that the interruptions... were my work.'

That professor could have *locked himself away* & devoted his time to his own private work. In that way he would have had a quieter life. But, being the generous & unselfish person that he was, he couldn't do that. Instead he made his work consist in being available to his students. *It was no surprise that he was greatly loved by the students. And, it was also no coincidence*

... that he was one of the happiest & most fulfilled professors on the campus.

(*New Sunday & Holy Day Liturgies, F. McCarthy, SDB, Year B)

Unselfishness is never easy.

But let's face it, at certain times it's easier than at others. It's easy when we are able to plan our good deeds - when the deed is of our own choosing, & we happen to be in the mood, and it causes us the minimum inconvenience & disruption. At other times, however, unselfishness is particularly difficult: when the deed is not of our own choosing, when we don't feel in the mood, & when it is sprung on us at an awkward moment. In such cases we have to forget ourselves, and set aside our feelings and our plans.

That's when a real sacrifice is involved.

Consider this: an act of kindness is judged, not so much by its importance, but by the disruption it causes in the life of the one who does it. It's a great test of people when, *at the drop of a hat*, they put aside their own plans to help another person.

Jesus knew this well....

Jesus too had to cope with many, many, interruptions.

Jesus too had his plans upset or turned upside down!

Today's Gospel tells us that he was in such demand that he & his apostles barely had *time to eat*. However, at some point he decided that enough was enough,

... and took the apostles off to a quiet place for a break.

This time he wasn't thinking of himself ... but of his apostles. They had just come back from the mission he had sent them on. He saw that they needed a rest. So he decided to take them off to a quiet place. *The caretakers, too, need to be cared for.*

However, things didn't work out as planned. The people followed them.*

2 How did Jesus react? Instead of being annoyed, he cared for the people. He saw that they were leaderless. The official teachers had no time for the ordinary folks. **But Jesus had time for them.** This is why they flocked to him. This tells ... us a lot about *the kind of person* he was/is. **He was moved with pity for them.** This is a rare glimpse into the inner life of Jesus. Jesus' own feelings are usually not reported. The New American Bible reads, "***His heart was moved with pity for them.***" This is an artful translation of the Greek, which uses the much earthier term, *splagchnizomai*. The word means something like "guts, bowels." Literally, it reads, "***He was moved in his guts for them.***" Mark's Gospel is making a strong connection between Jesus & the God of Israel, whose mercy is regularly described in the Septuagint with the same word (Greek version of OT). The Hebrew word behind this term is *rahamim*, a term closely related to "womb" and "love." This word is strongly identified with *motherhood*. The feeling Jesus experiences is similar to ... *that of a mother responding to an infant's hunger or to her child's cry.*

Rahamim is sympathy that inspires immediate action:

... and he began to teach them many things. (**America, 7/9/18)

This was an important juncture in Jesus' ministry, since he had recently suffered two disheartening setbacks, the rejection of Nazareth & the execution of John the Baptist. **In that moment, the crowd became a symbol of all humanity**, with its confusion, hopes, thwarted dreams & self-defeats. This insight filled Jesus with compassion, and that feeling drew him onward to ever greater action.**

The late Trappist monk, Thomas Merton, had such an insight: "*In Louisville, at the corner of Fourth & Walnut, in the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all these people, that they were mine & I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. It was like waking from a dream of separateness, of spurious ... self-isolation in a special world.*" (from: *Conjectures of A Guilty Bystander*)

Let us too wake up. They are all ours- brought near by the blood of Christ. Caring is never easy. Some people are willing to care a little, if they are in the mood, & it's not too inconvenient, and doesn't upset their own plans. But to care as Jesus did, when it does upset your plans - that's the real test. Parents do it all the time. How many times have they/you gotten out of bed at night to see to a child?

When we care, we are ... living the Gospel.

At this Liturgy of God Given Interruptions, remember that much good can come out of these "interruptions." They keep us from becoming so preoccupied with ourselves. Selfishness is a kind of prison. Love, on the other hand, sets us free.

An influential theologian of Vatican II, *Dom Helder Camara* once said: "***Accept surprises that upset your plans, shatter your dreams, give a completely different turn to your day and - Who knows? - to your life. It's not chance.***

Leave God free to weave the pattern of your days."

