



Jesus had plenty to do. In this week's Gospel (Mk 6:30-34) we read, "People were coming and going in great numbers, and they [Jesus and his disciples] had no opportunity even to eat." Wisely, Jesus arranged to go away with his disciples to a "deserted place" for a much needed rest. In this case, the old saying "There is no rest for the weary" truly came to pass. Sure enough, when they reached their "deserted place" they were greeted by a vast crowd which had anticipated their arrival! The Gospel captures Jesus' reaction: "When he disembarked and saw the vast crowd, his heart was moved with pity for them, for they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things." Here we catch a glimpse of the compassionate, loving heart of Jesus. Even though he was exhausted and seeking a much needed time of rest, he cannot help but respond to the needs of those who sought him out. The truth is, Jesus longs to teach each of us, to minister to us, to shepherd us, to save us – this is what he was born into this world to do! There is one thing, however, which can prevent us from receiving his life-giving care: ourselves. Jesus said, "Ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened for you." Similarly, the Letter of James says, "You covet but do not possess. You kill and envy but you cannot obtain; you fight and wage war. You do not possess because you do not ask. You ask but do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it

on your passions" (James 4:2–3, NAB). So, the secret to receiving Jesus' loving care is rather simple: we must ask for it with good intentions.

Jesus' response to the crowd in the Gospel has been repeated throughout the history of the Church. Today, Jesus' heart is moved with pity for us when we express our need and desire to be shepherded by him. The crowd had made a real effort to seek Jesus out, in fact, they had walked approximately 10 miles around the lake to find him! They were "like sheep without a shepherd;" they were asking, seeking and knocking and Jesus opened the windows of heaven for them!

"When he [Jesus] disembarked and saw the vast crowd, his heart was moved with pity for them, for they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things." (Mk 6:34)

What can we learn from this event in the life of Christ? How can we appear before Jesus in such a way that his heart will be moved with pity for us? How can we open ourselves to experience his loving care and his wise, beautiful, teaching? Is there a way for us to in effect "walk around the lake" and find the great shepherd of our souls? I give you three possibilities:

- 1) Study. Our culture is currently saturated with the most superficial, false, understanding of life and morality imaginable. Moral norms today are based on clichés like: "if it feels good do it"; "as long as it makes you happy"; "as long as you're not hurting anyone it must be okay." The Church's moral norms are rooted in the great beauty and dignity of the human person as created in the image of God. Unfortunately, God does not simply infuse these great truths into our minds without any effort on our part – he will teach us, but we must ask and seek and knock.
- 2) Prayer. As stated by St. James above, we cannot obtain what we truly need through recourse to covetousness, envy and anger; we receive the best things in life by simply asking God with pure, unselfish, intentions. As John Paul II one said, "Prayer brings heaven down to earth."
- 3) Look around. Jesus can be found in the least among us. What we do for them we do for Him!

Today, like the crowds in the Gospel, we can begin our journey around the lake to find Jesus. Just as they were willing to sacrifice and put forth real effort, so too If we are willing to seek wisdom from God through study, to take the time to ask God to provide our true needs, and to look for Jesus in the faces of those who are in need, then we will find the great Shepherd of our souls gazing upon us with heartfelt compassion and he will begin to teach us many things. Yes, Jesus has plenty to do; but he always has time for his sheep!

Your Servant in Christ,
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