

Homily 16th Sunday Year B **The Value of Being Still**

The story is told of an explorer in the Amazon who tried a forced march through the jungle. The first two days went well, but on the third day the native porters wouldn't move.

When he challenged them they said to him:

We can't go on. We have to let our bodies catch up with our souls.

We **all** need to pause now and then in order to stay **integrated** as human beings. Even those who have retired from their former work can find their days becoming very full and busy - and personally disruptive.

Dr William Menninger, an adviser to business executives, writes:

I recommend strongly that you set aside a little time each day...to decide where you are going. Do you know whether you are going in the right direction, and, most of all, where you want to get to?

This may remind us of a conversation in Lewis Carroll's tale **Alice in Wonderland**:

Alice: Which way should I go?

Caterpillar: That depends on where you want to get to.

Alice: I don't really much care where.

Caterpillar: Then it doesn't matter which way you go.

If you think about it, that curious exchange makes some sense.

Surely it's important to have some direction, some aim, to our life?

And, if we are going to have direction and purpose, then it is important to give ourselves time to be 'at rest', to be **inactive**, in order to ponder on that purpose and where we stand in relation to it.

Jesus recognised this, and urged his disciples to *stop what they were doing*, and *come away to a quiet place*, and be still for a while.

The practice of stillness is in fact quite radical in its effects. It is **restorative** – but also it **challenges** us on every level of our existence.

It challenges us on the level of **culture**. There is little in present-day western society that supports us in entering into what feels like ‘unproductive time’: to simply ‘be’, to simply ‘attend’.

It challenges us on the level of our **soul**. In the stillness we can become aware of inner dynamics we have been able to avoid by (deliberately?) keeping our selves noisy and busy.

It confronts us on the level of our human **relationships**. It calls us away from those relationships for a time so that we can give our undivided attention to God – who is actually at the **heart** of our life, who called us into being, and in whom is our ultimate end.

Stillness draws us into a **spiritual battle**, and into **victory**. In it lies the potential for each of us to know the true meaning of the psalmist’s words: *Be still and know that I am God** with such clarity that the competing powers of evil and sin and the ego-self can no longer hold us in their grip.** We can find ourselves exercising a new level of personal control, of the various aspects of our individual self – often at odds with each other - becoming better **integrated**.

* Psalm 46:10. ** With acknowledgements to Ruth Haley Barton *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*.

Rabbi David Wolpe tells the story of a fellow rabbi’s child who used to stray off into the forest. At first his father let him stray. But when it got to be a regular routine the father grew concerned. What was his child doing there? Besides, the forest could be dangerous.

One day he asked the child: *Why do you go into the forest each day?*

The child said: *I go to find God.*

The father responded: *That is a good thing to do, my child. I am pleased you search for God. But you should realise that God is the same everywhere.*

The child answered: *I know that Father, but I am not the same everywhere.*

The words of that child are both simple and profound.

It might be helpful for each person present here now to ask: What does it mean to say ‘*I am not the same everywhere*’? What do these words say to me?

And we could usefully pray each day: *Lord, help me go to a quiet place and rest* – and, having prayed that prayer, **seize** whatever opportunity is presented and make the most of it. In this way we will make good progress in our humanity.