

RED MASS 2014 - HOMILY



Bishop Gerald E. Wilkerson

A few weeks ago, while visiting a parish on Sunday, an older couple, a man and a woman, came up to me to chat after Mass. They told me that each of them had lost a spouse in the last few years and that they were so happy that they had met each other here at this parish and that they were really good for each other. They went on to explain that once a week he came to her house and she cooked a meal for him. And once a week

she went to his house and they watched a movie on TV together and had snacks. And once a week they went out to the movies together. I was thinking to myself that this story was going on too long and wondering why they were sharing all of this with me. And then came the zinger. "And once a week," she said, "we sleep together." Right away I thought to myself... TMI, too much information... now what am I going to say? But before I could say anything, he said, "That's right Bishop, every week during the homily."

You know, when a member of your Committee called me and asked me if I would give the homily today, I said that I thought that I was a poor choice because the law was really not my expertise. Oh, I was told, you'll do just fine. I was a little put off by this response but the more I thought about it, the more I realized that this was true. You don't want me to tell you how to do your job. I think it's my role to reflect with you about the person who practices law, about the person who does the job. And so that is what I will try to do.

Father Jim Martin, S.J., in his book *Jesus, A Pilgrimage*, says this. "The more I listen to people, the more I hear them speak about their lives using the same words: overworked, overbooked, overwhelmed, stressed-out, crazy-busy, nuts, insane. 'I have no time for my family.' 'I have no time to pray.' 'I barely have time to think.' Now this does not describe everyone's life: the unemployed, the underemployed, the sick, those in the last stages of life. But our culture has impressed upon us the equation that the busier you are, the more important you are.

Some of this pressure may be the result of an economy in which more hours are demanded from employees. Some of it can be traced to increasing pressures from advances in technology. Newer forms of communication mean that it is easy for us to be always connected. You're never far from work or from anyone intent on contacting you. But some of our busyness is the inevitable outcome of a world where over-activity is praised. And if everyone else is busy, who are we to opt out?"

Cardinal Francis George, the Archbishop of Chicago, points out that in our day religion is on the decline, that it is often dismissed. And he goes on to say: "The inevitable result is a crisis of belief for many Catholics. Throughout history, when Catholics and other believers in revealed religion have been forced to choose between being taught by God, or instructed by politicians, professors, editors of major newspapers and entertainers, many have opted to go along with the powers that be. This reduces a great tension in their lives, although it also brings with it the worship of a false god. It takes no moral courage to conform to government and social pressure. It takes a deep faith to swim against the tide, as Pope Francis encouraged young people to do at last summer's World Youth Day."

In a famous New Yorker cartoon, two men are standing before a large billboard that reads "STOP AND THINK." They stare at it for a while, and one of them says, "Kind of makes you want to stop and think."

Pope Francis, in his Exhortation, *The Joy of the Gospel*, says: "Whenever our interior life becomes caught up in its own interests and concerns, there is no longer room for others, no place for the poor. God's voice is no longer heard, the quiet joy of love is no longer felt and the desire to do good fades."

So let's stop and think for a moment. Whose voice, what voices are we listening to? Is there ever any room for God's voice, and if so, how does that voice get to us? Let me propose the following:

First of all, we need to know our God, and that comes from our sacred writings. Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of God, or, as St. Jerome says, ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Jesus. This is why Pope Francis is trying to get a pocket-sized copy of the Scriptures into everyone's hands so that it can be pulled out and read throughout the day...indeed anytime.

Then, in order to hear God's voice, we need to be people of prayer. Prayer is not like a spare tire, a 'spare wheel' that you pull out when in trouble, but it is the 'steering wheel' that directs us on the right path throughout our earthly journey. The prophet Amos says, "You say you are a believer, but you never think of God." Well, we do think of God sometimes---you know, when we go to church or maybe when we say grace before meals or our morning or night prayers. But do we think of God when we go to work? Do we believe that there is work a disciple of Jesus shouldn't do, even if that work is legal or respectable? Do we think of God when we shop? What about when we go out to eat or plan birthday parties or weddings? Do we think of God when we get a raise or come into some unexpected money? Do we think of God when we don't need God? Our relationship with God should not be confined to our time at church or our prayer time. Genuine relationships are organic. They encompass many aspects of our lives. They can't be bound or enclosed.

Finally, if we are to hear God's voice, we must be people of worship. God wants us to experience worship that changes our hearts. He wants us to connect with him in prayer so that we take on his mercy, love, patience and justice. We know that our weekly worship is fruitful when we notice our behavior changing. We act more kindly toward people. We are slower to judge and quicker to forgive. Our words become more upbuilding and we become more generous with our time and our resources. You see, Jesus enfleshes himself in our lives at every liturgy. We then have the task of enfleshing that same love of our God in the structures of the world around us through the witness of our lives.

So we know our God, we know Jesus, we hear God's voice, because we are familiar with our sacred writings, the Scriptures; we know our God, we know Jesus because we have an easy and frequent relationship of prayer, the steering wheel that guides our daily journey; we know our God, we know Jesus, because we are regular worshippers. Now what? Now we are missionaries! Now our profession is different, our family, our friends, our neighborhoods, our schools are changed. And we do this not by proselytizing, but by attraction, the attraction of our lives. And as Pope Francis says, we ought not to look like people who have just come from a funeral, but we ought to be joyous because of our relationship with our God, with Jesus. I remember an incident from my days as a pastor. It was Easter Sunday but I had had a very long

and busy Lent, an even busier Holy Week, and I was exhausted. So I celebrated Easter Mass and was greeting people after Mass when a woman said to me: "Father Jerry, Jesus has risen; notify your face!"

I think that there are two extremes for us to avoid. On the one hand, there are those people who go around spreading apathy. On the other hand, there are those who look like they are waiting for a vacancy in the Trinity.

If we really know our God we ought to be joyful disciples. "For where our treasure is, there also is our heart." "Today, amid so much darkness, we need to see the light of hope and to be men and women who bring hope to others." (Pope Francis)

So let me leave you with the words of St. Paul: "I am confident that the one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Christ Jesus....I hold you in my heart, you who are all partners with me in grace....And this is my prayer: that your love may increase ever more and more in knowledge and every kind of perception, to discern what is of value, so that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God."