

Mark's gospel leaves an impression of breathless haste. We will find him using such words as "straight away", "and immediately" which gives a feeling of urgency.

The Old Testament took thousands of years to unfold, but the New Testament unfolded in just a number of years. There is an urgency about the gospels – Mark's in particular – that make it quite clear they are not just for reading; they are for doing.

Today we get a glimpse of the Twelve's first hectic experience of pastoral work. They come home like children to their parents, telling Jesus everything they did that day.

However, it was grueling; so much so that they had not even been able to eat. When they tried to get away to a place where they could rest, they found more work waiting for them there.

Can you imagine what must have crossed their minds as they saw what loomed ahead of them: 10000s of people on the shores on what was to be a place for their time off.

I know what I would have been thinking and it would probably not earn me many points from Jesus. "God, will this day never end? I didn't know I signed up for this." (This would really depend on how my prayer life is going! More on that later.)

This is exhausting to read about, but it sounds like this present age, as is the norm that we run from one thing to the next. And yes, even getting here can be difficult – amidst our very busy lives.

+As many of you know I usually spend a week at the beach with my family, which includes nieces and nephews with their children. I'm not sure how much of a vacation young parents can really have.

One minute the kid is playing in the sand and the next thing you know he is halfway down the beach with a parent or grandparent running after him. Another is gunning for an open door; a time in which laughter can turn quickly tears. Brings new meaning to a "working vacation."

Someone said that a vacation is when you pack up the car with seven suitcases, the kids, in-laws, DVD's, laptop computer and say, "It's good to get away from it all." We go away without getting away.

That is somewhat the paradox of the gospel. He tells the disciples, "Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest awhile" and the next thing you know he is halfway down the beach leading his Apostles to those in need. Yes, that was his version of a working vacation.

We live in lots of a paradoxes, don't we? We long for an empty desk, but when it is empty we worry we have lost our usefulness. We long for the phones to stop ringing and when they do we wonder if anyone loves us. We long for the kids to be quiet and when they grow up and leave us in silence we become upset and hurt.

A paradox of our modern age, though, is that we are all connected electronically, 24-7, but we are not necessarily spiritually connected to one another nor to Jesus.

When school is in session and during the week it can get pretty noisy out there.

Heck, I thought our earthquake was a much larger bus passing by the house. And during those busy times, you have to watch where you are walking, because there are people out there who seemed to be controlled by phones.

But then you step out of it all and into here, before Christ, who reached into those busy lives, as the scripture put it, because "his heart was moved with pity...and he began to teach them many things."

I am afraid he could look at many of us times and see sheep without THE shepherd. I sometimes get so caught up with God's work but neglecting working with God to do so!

Can we put it all away at Mass, at dinner, to be with Jesus, to be with one another? One hour here on a weekend with Jesus can make all the difference in the crowded world we face in the week to come.

I'm not talking about always living in the solitude of a monastery because people are people and kids are kids and life is life.

Heck, even monasteries have their distractions and noises.

St. Teresa, the Little Flower, once wrote that there was a sister who lived with them that drove her crazy with all the noises she made. (St. Paul might refer to her as a thorn in one's side.) Teresa went to Jesus about this and she said he taught her to turn these noises into prayer, into music and so it happened as she found peace among it all.

That is the paradox, among the chaos of life, Jesus can be found, wanting to teach us how to live in this world.

But for Teresa to do so, for the Apostles to do what they were able to do, in the end, we all have at times need to be alone with Jesus, to pray with him and to listen to him.

Thomas Merton put it this way: "It is in the deep solitude and silence that I find the gentleness to love my brother and sister." Go to the shepherd, walk with him, be with him because as today's Psalm promises: "Beside restful waters he leads me, he refreshes my soul...I fear no evil; for you are at my side with your rod and staff that give me courage...Only goodness and Kindness follow me all the days of my life."

Then, with the Shepherd, we can step back into our busy world.