

# Silence brings soul's refreshment

By Father Albert Shamon  
Courier columnist

**Sunday's Readings:** (R3) Mark 6:30-34; (R1) Jeremiah 23:1-6; (R2) Ephesians 2:13-18.

The incident recorded in Sunday's Gospel came after a piece of very sad news — the execution of John the Baptist. At almost the same time, the Twelve returned from their first missionary tour of Galilee. Excitedly they told Jesus of their great success, of how even demons obeyed them. For the moment they were popular and crowds gathered around them.

Jesus was weary because news of the Baptist's death drained His loving heart. And the Twelve were tired from long walks and talks. So Jesus, thoughtful as always, invited them to rest, to take time off. "Come," He said, "by yourselves to an out-of-the-way place and rest a little." So they went off in a boat by themselves to a deserted place.

They rowed across the lake in a northeasterly direction for four miles from Capernaum to a deserted place. But they went in a leisurely fashion to get a much needed rest. The crowd, however, saw the boat and its destination, so they hoofed it around the



## A WORD FOR SUNDAY

top of the lake — a distance of 10 miles — so that a vast crowd was waiting for Jesus when He disembarked.

An ordinary man would have been annoyed and disappointed. But Jesus was never one to post office hours. Instead, He pitied them, for they were as sheep without a shepherd. Any Palestinian would catch the full import of what that figure meant.

Sheep without a shepherd are most to be pitied for they cannot find pasture for themselves, nor can they de-

fend themselves against predatory animals. Jesus saw His people, wandering aimlessly, not knowing where to find the spiritual food for which they were hungering and helpless against the "shepherds" of formal religion who were supposed to feed them, but who were misleading them and scattering the flock. Of them Jeremiah said: "Woe to the shepherds who mislead and scatter the flock of my pasture."

Jesus' compassion for their needs took precedence over the needs of the rest. So He "began to teach them at length." When evening came, the disciples were for sending them away. But Jesus was for feeding them. With five loaves and two fish, He fed 5,000 men, women and children.

By this miracle, Jesus again shows His concern not only for the needs of the soul, but also for the body's needs. In material creation there is light and darkness, saying that there is a time to sleep and a time to rise. Winter is nature's way of telling the earth to take time off. All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy. A bow always strung loses its snap. People can do more and better work in six days than in seven.

Not only a person's body, but his

or her mind and soul also need rest — to go apart and be alone with Christ. How important it is to make at least an annual retreat: to withdraw from life's hustle and bustle and be alone with Christ.

Daily quiet times of retreat and reflection are necessary to one's spiritual well-being. Quiet times bring refreshment of soul. The center is restored, and peripheral things fade away. Peace, knowledge, wisdom and spiritual joy — these are some of the treasures of daily retreat. To say nothing of the greatest treasure of all, that of feeling God's presence.

Elijah discovered that God was not in the strong and heavy wind, nor in the earthquake, nor in the fire, but in a tiny whispering sound (1 Kings 19:11-12). Silence is only the stilling of our voice to hear God's voice.

The American painter Grant Wood once confided, "All the really good ideas I ever had came to me while I was milking a cow."

A great pianist was once asked by an ardent admirer: "How do you handle the notes as well as you do?"

The artist answered: "The notes I handle no better than many pianists, but the pauses between the notes — Ah! That is where the art resides."

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Grandfather and grandchild in Uganda

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