



A Reflection on Finding Sacred Space this Summer

In the various Gospel Accounts of Jesus' ministry we are given the opportunity to reflect upon the fact that Jesus went off by Himself to pray. In Mark's Gospel, after Jesus' baptism, we read: *"The Spirit immediately drove Him out into the wilderness. And He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and He was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to Him."* (Mark 1:12-13). From a great spiritual high point, when Jesus heard a voice from heaven assuring Him of God's favor and knew that the Holy Spirit was with Him, He went into the wilderness to wrestle with the implications of this experience and determine a way forward in response to God's call. He went to find "sacred space" where He could open His soul to God and seek strength for His mission.

Further along, in the first chapter of Mark's Gospel (1:35) we note: *"And in the morning, a great while before day, He rose and went out to a lonely place, and there He prayed."* Jesus needed time alone to pray, not just occasionally, but on a regular basis. We can only imagine what Jesus prayed about but we can certainly assume that if it was important for Him and His ministry that He spent time alone with God then it must be important for us, His disciples, to follow that example.

Our own experiences are not usually dramatic, but nevertheless if we are to make sense of them and discern what God wants of us, there are times when we need to be away from the usual distractions of life. Jesus Himself indicated this when, as recorded in Mark 6:31: He said to His disciples: *"Come away by yourselves to a lonely place, and rest awhile."* For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. Many of us have times of being so busy that we grab a bite to eat on the way from one meeting to another and end up with indigestion and the inability to think straight. Such busyness seems to be part of human existence but it has to be counted with time deliberately spent apart with God if we are to be truly disciples of Christ. Following the ministrations of Jesus to His disciples, and the feeding of a huge crowd of people who had followed them we read, *"And after He had taken leave of them, He went up on a mountain to pray"* Mark 6:46. Jesus took time out to be with God in order to renew His spirit and gather His own thoughts before continuing with His work. There are countless other examples in all the Gospels culminating with Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the Cross.

The disciples were used to seeing Jesus go off to pray and obviously reflected on this regular practice. St. Luke (11:1) reads: *"He was praying in a certain place, and when He ceased, one of His disciples said to Him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught His disciples.'" In response to the question comes what is known as The Lord's Prayer, so familiar to all of us. In the passage in Matthew's Gospel where the Lord's Prayer is recorded, St. Matthew has a particularly interesting note (Matthew 6:6): "But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you."*

Most of the houses that the disciples knew were small, most one-roomed structures. And so, being creative to find sacred space was something of ingenuity and grace. Finding a spot to be alone with God on a regular basis was the real task at hand. The inward journey, daring to enter the hidden places and encounter our own demons in those internal desert areas, has to be a sustained enterprise, taking a lifetime of effort. So discerning sacred space is vital to success of this journey.

And so, finding a chair in a quiet corner, or securing a moment in the late evening or early morning on a constant basis is exactly our task today. We are called to enter into an ongoing relationship with God. Whether or not we can enjoy extended retreats periodically to experience the serenity of time away from everyday work and living, we can find sacred space somewhere that can be used

daily. Our life with God is not something to be enjoyed from time to time when we can fit it in. Rather the going apart to pray regularly, is the bedrock foundation of life; the place of transformation and renewal.

*Lovingly, Yours in Christ,
Father Ron ☩*