

VESPERS HOMILY

10 FEBRUARY 2019

MARK 1: 29 – 39

PALM 147: 1 – 12, 21c

Happy and I attended Cursillo number 31, or maybe 32, in the Diocese of Georgia.

It was quite a while ago, in the early 1980s, and Cursillo was still mysterious, perhaps it still is.

I was still on active duty and I was also studying to be ordained a Deacon. The rector of Saint Augustine's Episcopal Church in Augusta, Georgia, the church we attended, gave the distinct impression that attending Cursillo was expected of me, of us.

“What exactly is Cursillo” I asked. He said that it was sort of a retreat. I was delighted. Between my diaconal study and my work at Fort Gordon and other assorted Army jobs, many of which required travel, I was ready for a few days of silence and prayers and reading.

It didn't exactly turn out that way.

The Cursillo was at Honey Creek. It was much more primitive then, much smaller, as was Honey Creek.

We each found that, rather than rooming together, we were assigned a roommate.

After a communal dinner in the dining hall we all met for a briefing on the gist of the Cursillo; from that moment until after breakfast the next morning we were on a silent retreat. Go to your rooms and say nothing.

I was delighted.

I went to the room. There was no roommate so I went to bed and started reading some holy, inspirational book suitable for the occasion.

Some time later my roommate entered and silently gestured that he was going to take a shower. I waved back and just continued reading although I was vaguely aware of the noise of a shower running. I was also aware of someone using the shower.

Suddenly there was loud crash, apparently from the bathroom. The shower kept right on running, otherwise it was silent.

It was silent for quite some time. I finally marked the page of my book, got out of bed and went to the door, knocking and asking if he was alright. There was no response. Thinking my roommate to be hard of hearing, I knocked again several times with no response.

I really didn't want to open that door, but I did.

There in the tub lay a large, naked, soapy, totally unconscious stranger. That's the way to start a retreat. When I spoke he came around, slightly. I managed to get him seated on the toilet, covered his nakedness with a towel, and went to find help.

I found the mysterious Cursillo staff in the dining hall having some sort of conference. Apparently, it had to do with beer.

Breaking my silence I made them aware that there was a very ill, wet and naked man in my room and would they want to do something about it. Apparently they did, or perhaps they were just curious, because they all followed me to my room.

It wasn't a very large room. They filled it. It became even more crowded when the ambulance and emergency personnel arrived, silently, silently in the spirit of the retreat.

There was no silence for Jesus. There was no silence in the synagogue in Capernaum; no silence in the house of Peter's mother in law, another small room crowded with the concerned and the curious. No silence even in the "solitary" place to which he had fled "very early in the morning." Even there they were looking for Him.

Jesus' reply is "Let us go somewhere else – to the nearby villages – so I can preach there also." Perhaps he meant 'let us go somewhere else where they will hear me, not just see me.' Jesus is exhausted.

Jesus needed a “lonely place.” We all do. It’s hard to shut the door against the intrusions of the world.

There are many “silent” and “lonely” places. Some are quite well known and often used, others are personal. They are there; we must find them or, perhaps, create them. What shall we do in such a place?

For Jesus the lonely place wasn’t a passive time away; it was the place of prayer, the opening of His soul. He was as active there as He was with that throng that cried for healing.

“Let us go on the next towns.” The commentary in the Interpreters Bible tells Us “Those words reveal Jesus’ eagerness to preach throughout Galilee. Capernaum was a starting point, not an ultimate goal. He refused to be localized. It was not enough to be a popular healer in one place; He came to preach the Kingdom of God.”

As a postscript I should tell you that the next day, when speech was restored, I became a bit of a celebrity; the man who lost his roommate.

When Paul Reeves, the Bishop at that time, having heard about the incident, sought me out and asked me if it might not have been in the spirit of the silent retreat to simply have left him in the tub and run warm water over him until morning.