



NINTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

CYCLE B

Deuteronomy 5:12-15

2 Corinthians 4:6-11

Mark 2:23-3:6

GATHERING

(Seven unlit candles are arranged here and there around the gathering place. A crucifix rests by itself on a table visible to all.)

This week's liturgy summons us to connect more deeply with the sabbath call to attentive rest. Last week we focused on how God's commitment to humankind is like that of lover to the beloved. *(As this session begins, members spend some time in conversation about how their love affair with God was lived out this past week.)*

OPENING PRAYER

(The facilitator calls the community to be conscious of God's presence. Six of the candles are lighted; the seventh is left at rest. Some quiet instrumental music is played.)

Member: Sing with joy to God our help.

All: Sing with joy to God our help.

Member: Take up a melody, and sound the timbrel,
the pleasant harp and the lyre.

Blow the trumpet at the new moon,
at the full moon, on our solemn feast.

All: Sing with joy to God our help.

Member: For it is a statute in Israel,
an ordinance of the God of Jacob,
who made it a decree for Joseph
when he came forth from the Land of Egypt.

All: Sing with joy to God our help.

Member: An unfamiliar speech I hear:
"I relieved his shoulder of the burden;
his hands were freed from the basket.
In distress you called, and I rescued you."

All: Sing with joy to God our help.

Member: "There shall be no strange god among you
nor shall you worship any alien god.
I, the LORD, am your God
who led you forth from the land of Egypt."

Sing with joy to God our help.

Psalm 81:3-4, 5-6, 6-8, 10-11

Focus Question

How hard is it for you to do nothing?

SCRIPTURE SHARING AND REFLECTION

(The scriptures are proclaimed aloud with a pause between readings.)

Work, work, work! "Americans spend more time on the job than any other workers in the developed world..." so reports the **Hartford Courant** a while back, referencing a study by the U.N. International Labor Organization. A recent report on CNN suggested that in this 21st century people will have to work even longer hours. How much jubilee is there in that prospect?

Now, work is holy. It is not only about *making a living*, it is also about being a co-creator with God. Nevertheless, the biblical witness is that even God rests!

We live today in a world in which the biblical notion of sabbath seems like a total anachronism. Sabbath seems to be regarded as just a royal waste of time! In the guise of meeting our needs, however, our market-driven consumer culture is taking us for all we are worth. Caught up in a world of frenzied activity, often compensated for by numbing escape, the call to sabbath is a call to break the chains that lock us into what seems like a never-ending cycle of work. The call to sabbath is a call to healing, for ourselves, for all around us, for the earth itself.

The approaching season of Lent offers a special opportunity to re-connect to the roots of sabbath. In the labor-intensive world of Deuteronomy, the biblical *pro-life* call to a Sabbath embraced all, including slaves and animals. Biblical Jubilee is Grand Sabbath, if you will. It calls for even the land itself to lie fallow. It calls for healing rest for the whole of creation. And God knows the earth needs a break! In a world where sabbath seems like a luxury no one can afford, we all need a break!

Deuteronomy and this week's psalm roots Sabbath in God's liberating activity on behalf of his people. Our lives rest, as it were, in the strong hand and outstretched arm of our God who saves us. Sabbath is not just a day's rest from what we do for ourselves six days a week so we can go back and do more. Sabbath celebrates not what we accomplish for and by ourselves, but what God does for us. Indeed, sabbath enlightenment serves to orient us to work more cooperatively with God's project of bringing about *a new creation*. Connect to Sabbath more deeply this Lent.

We are a long way from the rigid Pharisaic regulation of sabbath activity. So far, in fact, that, for too many, Jesus' declaration, "The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath", now simply means we are dispensed from sabbath entirely. At our peril!

Addicted to activity, jaded by constant stimulation of one kind or another, the soul's receptors are dulled. The rat race intensifies. Meaning evaporates. We lose touch with God and the sense of the presence of God's strong hand and outstretched arm. We hanker after angels. All we need do is re-discover sabbath!

Sabbath calls us to the attentive rest in which soul opens. Being in touch with our God is worth a royal *waste* of time!

FAITH SHARING AND INTEGRATION

- ◆ How much sabbath is there in your life, in the life of your family?
- ◆ How much leisure is there in your life? How do you feel when you are genuinely *at your leisure*?
- ◆ To what extent does the way you celebrate sabbath bring you rest, rejuvenation, healing?
- ◆ What are the life circumstances which might make embracing sabbath time a difficult experience for you? What needs to change in your life to be able to experience sabbath more fully?
- ◆ How is sabbath observance more a gift or an obligation for you?
- ◆ What does sabbath observance mean to you in your present life? How has your observance of sabbath changed over the years? Are these changes for good or ill?

RESPONSE IN ACTION

- ◆ A family drive in the country on a Sunday afternoon is, perhaps, but a quaint image of life from by-gone days. But is there no equivalent? Put your imagination to work and come up with a way for family/friends to *waste* a Sunday afternoon together.
- ◆ Set aside twenty minutes some day this week to sit down quietly by yourself to do nothing. Listen to your soul. Listen for God. Discover God's strong hand and outstretched arm holding you up.
- ◆ If you are an employer, or have people working under your supervision, assess the *humanity* of the *work* atmosphere of the operation you are responsible for, and make a change where it may be needed.

- ◆ Help others help themselves in this market-driven world of ours. Train to serve as a Literacy Volunteer. Literacy Volunteers has two different programs: the Basic Literacy Program (BL) teaches reading and writing skills to functionally illiterate adults. English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teaches conversational English to adults whose native language is not English. No prior teaching or foreign language background is necessary.
- ◆ Provide some respite to a caregiver who needs a break and the opportunity for some sabbath time. Take his/her place for a day or part of a day.

SENDING FORTH AND CLOSING PRAYER

(The facilitator lights the seventh candle and extinguishes the other six. Some quiet instrumental music is played. The facilitator invites the members of the community to dwell for some minutes in silent, attentive rest.)

*(After a period of extended quiet, the facilitator invites the community to offer prayers of praise, thanksgiving and petition. To each prayer offered, members respond, **Save us, O God, with your strong hand and your outstretched arm!**)*

(The session concludes with the singing of "Healer of Our Every Ill" and the exchange of a sign of peace.. The song may be found on the Internet..)