

Wednesday was a big day for St. Paul's and for Madrid. And I want to start off with thanking everyone that made Wednesday possible. We had great support from our St. Paul's family; but we also had a member from St. John's help us and we received a great donation from Town and Country. Those along with all of the hard work everyone put in leading up to the day and then our hard work through the bike ride, made it a huge success.

If you were brave enough or foolish enough to venture out on Wednesday, you would have noticed two types of riders. The first were the riders that just wanted to get through town and get to camp before it got too hot that day. The second group were people that wandered through town and seemed to be enjoying the day and were not as serious about the ride as others were.

We met some interesting people with great stories from all around the world. We had riders stop by our booth from England, Canada, and Australia as well as many different states around the US. We spoke with the Muscatine man that wandered off, a woman that was receiving cancer treatments while on RAGBRAI, and a man that had a heart transplant and was riding RAGBRAI in honor of the woman whose heart he had because he felt she made him a better person.

We had many discussions about Iowa nuances with people from other states. The concept of what a beefburger is was completely foreign to a number of people. But it was easier than trying to explain what raisin or chocolate chip pie is to people who are not from the Midwest.

All of that was from the second group of people. If people from the first group came through, their leader was barking out orders to others in their group or yelling at people to move right and get out of their way. That is if they even turned and came down 2nd Street. So many people went around the barricades and kept going south, bypassing the town events almost completely.

As I saw all of those people going straight, I thought about how hard it was going to be for some of the other vendors that were set up downtown. All of us had gone to the RAGBRAI meetings and had an expectation about how many people were going through town, and now probably close to half weren't going by where the vendors were. I was worried that not everyone would be able to recover from the potential loss of business.

For the previous two weeks, whenever I would reach out to someone in the community, they would tell me that they were too busy to talk or volunteer or whatever, because they were getting ready for RAGBRAI. They were too busy and couldn't take the time away, but I should check back after RAGBRAI.

So, I did. And you know what they said then? They said that they were too busy because they were now getting ready for Labor Day. Isn't that how most of us live our lives? We end one task and immediately start another. If it isn't that, then it is some event for our kids or our grandchildren. We always have something going on.

So many times people forget to take a second and have a break. Now that we all have cell phones it is easy for us to continually be checking our emails or message someone about work.

Or we schedule something for times that we should be spending with others listening to what God is trying to tell us.

In today's reading, Luke shows us two sisters that behave in this manner when Jesus comes to visit them. Martha spends most of Jesus' visit working. She was preparing a meal for him. She cleaned and continued to entertain. But, her sister Mary sat at Jesus' feet and listened to what he said instead of helping Martha.

This bothered Martha a great deal. Honestly, who wouldn't it bother? If someone as important as Jesus was in our house, wouldn't we expect help from someone? Most of us wouldn't want to be doing all of that work alone.

Eventually Martha got tired of doing everything alone and pointed out her sister's behavior to Jesus and asked him to make Mary work and assist Martha. But instead, Jesus told Martha that she was distracted and was missing out on the actual lesson. Mary, on the other hand, had chosen to listen to Jesus and his teaching and that could never be taken away from her.

Martha was so distracted that she was actually overlooking what was going on. Yes it was of great importance that Jesus was in her home; but what good was it really to her if she was so distracted that she wasn't paying attention to what he was saying. The distractions were so much more in her life that she couldn't see what was truly important.

It is like with Peter when we read Matthew 14:22-33 a couple of weeks ago. While Peter was focused on Jesus and what Jesus was saying, Peter was safe. But, as soon as he was distracted and started focusing on the wind, the water, the boat, and the others, he started to sink. He was distracted by everything happening in his surroundings and wasn't paying attention to Jesus.

We can all get that way, so much is happening in our lives that we lose sight of Jesus and what he has taught us. We put so much emphasis on what is happening around us that we ignore what is truly important.

On Thursday, so many people were trying to recover their losses from RAGBRAI. Others were moving on and starting to prepare for Labor Day, but how many were taking the time to hear what God was saying?

How many were continuing to do the right thing not because they got recognition for it, but because it was the right thing to do? How many people were taking a step back, like Mary, and were enjoying the time that they got to spend with the people they met on Wednesday? They were listening and discerning what God was trying to tell them.

That is what is important. In thirty years, I will remember talking with Andy Davis about how much he appreciated us having a place for him to cool off and listening to his story about his

heart donor Sarah and how she made him a better listener and a better person. I'll remember that over how many slices of pie we sold or how much beefburger we had left over.

Those little distractions seem so important to us today. But are they really? Will it be important that we checked an email or sat in on a Labor Day committee meeting or will it be more important that we spent time with our fellow Christians and spread God's love?

Let us pray:

Oh God, we give you thanks:

For those who have gone before us and from whose questions, struggles to know and wisdom we benefit.

Thank you for the Mary and Martha's of our life and our church.

For the gifts of new possibilities that await in spite of our distraction

For those who see things we cannot because of our fear, our experience, our knowing ...

For those who wonder in ways that surprise us, invite us and challenge us

For those who work so hard and continue to do so even when we take them for granted, when we betray them, when we neglect to treat them with justice or respect, when we assume and presume and then are shocked at their rebellion

Our God, we give you thanks that it is not all about us, that you continue to care and to love and to create possibilities of redemption and new life not only here among us but throughout your world.

Help us get over ourselves enough to be able to sit in your presence, like Mary

Help us to have the humility and the courage to wonder, if only for a moment

Help us to carry that same spirit of curiosity and discovery beyond these walls into the world in which we serve and which you love.

Let us dare to hope

That no child will go to sleep hungry and none will find shelter under a piece of cardboard

That violence will be absent from families

Let us dare to hope that you have not forgotten even us,

even at this place and time in our lives.

Make us a dangerous people – for once not to each other  
but to all those resentments, preconceptions  
and reasons why your future should not be the future,  
for your church AND for your creation.

We only dare such craziness  
because we sit in the presence of One whose prayer we echo.  
Our father....