

Summer Vacation



Picture this: Mom ‘n Dad driving 350 miles with 3 boys – ages 6, 9, and 11 – to the North Woods for a 2-week fishing trip. No doubt images of marital discord, alcoholic consumption, or even child abuse flashed across your minds. My Dad, being a surgeon, had a more humane solution. He decided to spike our orange juice with phenobarbital. Brother Tom was out cold before we pulled out of the driveway. Brother Jim and I, however, had a classic paradoxical hyperactive reaction ... for the entire ride.

What possible explanation could there be for my parents to undertake such an ordeal? On the surface, most of us would agree that those summer Odysseys forged our family bonds and many personal memories. The lake, the frog pond, the ‘one that got away.’ Or perhaps even fond memories of the pontoon parties or that girl on the other side of the lake. Fast forward to today, and many of us just long for the absence of the phone or the pressures of work. This is nothing new to the 21st Century. So, let’s take a deeper look.

Early in his Gospel, Mark wrote,

...because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.” So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. (Mark 6: 31-32)

Scriptures also tell us that the Jesus would occasionally leave the group to pray, to be alone with His Father. We even overhear his private dialog with God as he foresaw his own passion and death. What can we take away from these episodes?

The first, and most obvious, is the need to pray to the Father in private. Jesus gave us a template for prayer in the Our Father. It starts with praise to the Father, a desire for and submission to His will, and moves into a plea for our physical needs. Then it pleads for our spiritual needs of forgiveness and protection. It closes with a renewal of our own personal covenant commitment to live in the Kingdom. Praise, petition, and promise. Looking deeper still, something even more personal is revealed in his example.

During the accounts of both the Agony in the Garden and the Transfiguration on the mountain, we overhear his dialog with the Father. In other words, Jesus prayed out loud. Not in a whisper to the ground or into some space within his head, but in audible words to a living person. In other words, prayer is about relationship. In the present context, it is about our relationship with God, as inspired by the example of our brother, Jesus.

So, what should we take away from this on our next trip to the lake? Let me answer that with a closing question:

Is it better to sit in Church thinking about fishing, or to sit in a boat thinking about God?

