

Fr. Roger J. Landry
Retreat for Bishops, "Renewing and Strengthening the Resolve"
Shellbourne Conference Center
Valparaiso, Indiana
March 6-10, 2017

Coming Apart with Jesus to a Deserted Place and Resting

- Mk 6:30-32: The apostles gathered together with Jesus and reported all they had done and taught. He said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while." People were coming and going in great numbers, and they had no opportunity even to eat. So they went off in the boat by themselves to a deserted place."
 - The same Jesus who called his first apostles apart to a deserted place with him so that they could rest a while is calling us this week. He's calling us away from our work, from the various duties that sometimes cause us to delay eating or eat not at all. In a special way, during this first week of Lent, he's calling us to go with him into the state of the desert, apart from distractions, apart from normal work.
 - He gives us each that personal three-fold invitation to come away with him, to go into the desert with him, and to rest with him.
 - We've responded to the first of the three. Getting here is sometimes half the battle.
 - The second stage is harder. Every Lent, the same Holy Spirit whom St. Luke tells us led Jesus into the desert wants to guide us into the desert with him. Lent is meant to help us recapitulate Christ's 40 days away from everything so that we, apart from distractions, can focus on who we are, on our relationship with God and others and, with Christ's help, can confront and overcome the way that the devil seeks to distort those relations and that image. To go into the desert, however, is increasingly difficult for people today, including for bishops and priests, because our devices leave us so connected us to the world that it's getting harder to power down. We can easily feel lost if we are out of cell phone range. While the Lord is not calling us all physically to go to the Arabah, or Mohavi or Sahara, he is calling us to the state of the desert, removing ourselves from distractions, from the television, computer, radio, newspaper, from meetings, pile of problems and mounds of work that can crowd our lives with so much noise that we can't hear God and so much clutter that we can't see God. The first temptation we face each Lent, the first test of a retreat, is to refuse to go into the desert with Christ. The first big hurdle is for us to respond to Christ's summons, and the Holy Spirit's driving, us into the desert.
 - The third is rest. Many of us may need some physical rest, as the apostles did. Such rest is a fundamental good, as we see in the rest himself God took on the seventh day. Such rest alone, like a truly good night's rest, can be like an experience of rebirth, of resurrection. But there's another type of rest Jesus wants to give us. It's the type he described elsewhere in the Gospel, when he said, "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest." The rest he describes is surprising: "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for your selves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light." The rest Jesus points to is a yoke, an instrument to join us to him precisely in our work, just like two oxen would be joined for plowing. Jesus gives us rest by uniting ourselves to him as we work his vineyards. In the *con-jugum*, in that loving bond of Bridegroom with our receptivity within the Church as Bride, in that linking between Bridegroom and Friend of the Bridegroom, he teaches us humility, he teaches us meek strength, and we find rest, because he says, his yoke is "tailor-made," it fits perfectly, and lights our sense of burden. We know that the yoke he offers to us in order to find our rest is his Cross, which is not so much a sign of pain but of the love that makes that much pain bearable. When we unite ourselves to him on the Cross, then filled with his love for us, we begin to overflow with that love for him and others as we work in tandem. That's what makes our burdens lighter and sweeter. As we pray each morning as we put on the chasuble, we pray at the beginning of this retreat, *Domine, qui dixisti, iugum meum suave est and onus meum leve. Fac ut istud portare sic valeam ut consequar tuam gratiam!* That great will be the rest

we need in the midst of our labors and burdens in order to be ready to return from Tabor to climb Calvary.

- A retreat is precisely for that yoking. We come away precisely so that the Lord can unite us to himself and renew us. Pope Francis, we know, is on retreat with members of the Curia at the same time. This is his third retreat with them, away from Rome, in one of the traditional retreat places in the Alban Hills. A couple of years back, he talked about how important it is for him and his chief collaborators to get away from everything. Past retreats used to be held in the Vatican, most recently in the Redemptoris Mater Chapel within the Apostolic Palace. Retreatants would come for two-to-three preached meditations in the first half of the day and then return to their offices to work afterward. Pope Francis, who as a Jesuit has preached scores of retreats and guided thousands of retreatants in the past, immediately saw that that was not an optimal circumstance to make spiritual exercises, so he arranged for a retreat house outside the city to which he and the prelates could go to focus on the Lord and leave their work behind.
- One of the major reforms of the Roman Curia he has said he wants to foster is that those in the administration have a chance to focus on “ad-ministration,” making their work a ministry, so that they don’t become bureaucrats but servants with a priestly, religious or faithfully lay Catholic mindset. In an interview on with the Italian newspaper, *Corriere della Sera*, he was asked about many of the changes he was making in the Vatican and the first one he brought up was the change about retreats. “In my way of action,” he stated, “I wait for the Lord to give me inspiration. Let me give you an example. There has been talk about the spiritual care of those who work in the Curia and they began to make spiritual retreats. Greater importance should be given to the yearly spiritual exercises: everyone has a right to spend five days in silence and meditation, while previously in the Curia they heard three meditations each day than then continued to work.”
- This wisdom comes from his Jesuit experience. In his spiritual exercises, the founder of the Jesuits, St. Ignatius of Loyola, strongly urged retreats to take place away from home and daily activities. The retreatant “will, ordinarily, benefit himself more the more he separates himself from all friends and acquaintances and from all earthly care, as by changing from the house where he was dwelling, and taking another house or room to live in, in as much privacy as he can, so that it be in his power to go each day to Mass and to Vespers, without fear that his acquaintances will put obstacles in his way.” St. Ignatius said that there are three benefits from getting away from familiar places.
 - First, “Man, by separating himself from many friends and acquaintances and likewise from many not well-ordered affairs to serve and praise God our Lord, merits no little in the sight of His Divine Majesty.”
 - Second, “Being thus isolated and not having his understanding divided on many things but concentrating his care on one only, namely, on serving his Creator and benefiting his own soul, he uses with greater freedom his natural powers, in seeking with diligence what he so much desires.”
 - And third, “The more our soul finds itself alone and isolated, the more apt it makes itself to approach and to reach its Creator and Lord, and the more it so approaches Him, the more it disposes itself to receive graces and gifts from His Divine and Sovereign Goodness.”
 - So getting away is more meritorious, makes it easier to focus, and helps someone to be more open and docile to the work God wants to do within him or her. By conspicuously going away on a retreat on his anniversary, Pope Francis is clearly setting an example for the whole Catholic world. “Everyone has a right to spend five days in silence and meditation,” he said in the interview earlier this month. Everyone need that time away for rest in order, as he said on another occasion: The person, he said, who makes a good “experiences the attraction, the fascination of God, and returns renewed, transfigured to ordinary life, to service, to daily relations, bearing within him the perfume of Christ. ... The men and women of today need to encounter God,” he continued. Retreats offer

“space and time for intense listening of His Word in silence and in prayer and contribute to “renewing one who participates in them in unconditional adherence to Christ, helping him to understand that prayer is the irreplaceable means of union with Him crucified.” It’s the indispensable means of yoking.

- Silence

- So we’ve responded to the Lord’s first invitation, to come away with him. We are here. But we also have his second and third calls, to the desert and the yoke.
- About the second, I’d like to turn to the theme of exterior and interior silence.
 - Zechariah’s medicine. Observed our Lady. Out came the *Benedictus* after 9 months.
 - Pope Benedict several years ago gave a Catechesis on St. Anthony of the Desert and commented, “Anthony reminds us that prayer requires an atmosphere of **silence**, which does not mean distance from external noise but rather is **an interior experience that aims to remove the distractions caused by a soul's anxieties, thereby creating silence in the soul itself.**” That’s what a retreat is meant to help facilitate.
 - In VD 66, he built on that point about the importance of silence in relation to the word of God and its reception: “The word, in fact, can only be spoken and heard in silence, outward and inward. Ours is not an age that fosters recollection; at times one has the impression that people are afraid of detaching themselves, even for a moment, from the mass media. For this reason, it is necessary nowadays that the People of God be educated in the value of silence.” That education begins with ourselves. He continues, “Rediscovering the centrality of God’s word in the life of the Church also means rediscovering a sense of recollection and inner repose. The great patristic tradition teaches us that the mysteries of Christ all involve silence. Only in silence can the word of God find a home in us, as it did in Mary, woman of the word and, inseparably, woman of silence.
 - August 10, 2010 Catechesis:
 - Silence is the environmental condition most conducive to contemplation, to listening to God and to meditation. The very fact of enjoying silence and letting ourselves be “filled”, so to speak, with silence, disposes us to prayer
 - The great prophet Elijah on Mount Horeb — that is, Sinai — experienced a strong squall, then an earthquake and finally flashes of fire, but he did not recognize God’s voice in them; instead, he recognized it in a light breeze (cf. 1 Kings 19:11-13).
 - God speaks in silence, but we must know how to listen. This is why monasteries are oases in which God speaks to humanity; and in them we find the cloister, a symbolic place because it is an enclosed space yet open to Heaven.
 - Jesus’ prayer in the silence of the Cross.
- Cardinal Sarah has a great new book that still hasn’t been translated into English, *La Force du Silence contre la Dictature du Bruit.*” The Strength of Silence against the Dictatorship of Noise. He says some extraordinary things there, that point us to the experience of the desert, of the deserted place with Christ. He summarized the book in an interview, saying, “
 - “God’s first language is silence.” In commenting on this beautiful, rich insight of Saint John of the Cross, Thomas Keating, in his work *Invitation to Love*, writes: “Everything else is a poor translation. In order to understand this language, we must learn to be silent and to rest in God.”
 - It is time to rediscover the true order of priorities. It is time to put God back at the center of our concerns, at the center of our actions and of our life: the only place that He should occupy. Thus, our Christian journey will be able to gravitate around this Rock, take shape in the light of the faith and be nourished in prayer, which is a moment of silent, intimate encounter in which a human being stands face to face with God to adore Him and to express his filial love for Him. ...
 - I think that we are the victims of the superficiality, selfishness and worldly spirit that are spread by our media-driven society. We get lost in struggles for influence, in conflicts between persons, in a narcissistic, vain activism. We swell with pride and pretention, prisoners of a will to power. For the sake of titles, professional or ecclesiastical duties, we accept vile compromises. But all

that passes away like smoke. In my new book I wanted to invite Christians and people of good will to enter into silence; without it, we are in illusion. The only reality that deserves our attention is God Himself, and God is silent. He waits for our silence to reveal Himself. Regaining the sense of silence is therefore a priority, an urgent necessity. Silence is more important than any other human work. Because it expresses God. The true revolution comes from silence; it leads us toward God and toward others so that we can place ourselves humbly at their service.

- God is silence, and this divine silence dwells within a human being. By living with the silent God, and in Him, we ourselves become silent. Nothing will more readily make us discover God than this silence inscribed at the heart of our being. I am not afraid to state that to be a child of God is to be a child of silence. Conquering silence is a battle and a form of asceticism. Yes, it takes courage to free oneself from everything that weighs down our life, because we love nothing so much as appearances, ease and the husk of things. Carried away toward the exterior by his need to say everything, the garrulous man cannot help being far from God, incapable of any profound spiritual activity. In contrast, the silent man is a free man. The world's chains have no hold on him. No dictatorship can do anything against a silent man. You cannot steal a man's silence from him.
- God is silence, and the devil is noisy. From the beginning, Satan has sought to mask his lies beneath a deceptive, resonant agitation. The Christian owes it to himself not to be of the world. It is up to him to turn away from the noises of the world, from its rumors that run headlong in order to turn better toward what is essential: God. Our busy, ultra-technological age has made us even sicker. Noise has become like a drug on which our contemporaries are dependent. With its festive appearance, noise is a whirlwind that avoids looking oneself in the face and confronting the interior emptiness. It is a diabolical lie. The awakening can only be brutal. I am not afraid to call on all people of good will to enlist in a form of resistance. What will become of our world if it cannot find oases of silence?
- That's the oasis to which Christ calls us during these days. I invite you, as much as you can, to keep that interior silence.
- Silence is part of our good soil.
 - Not hardened.
 - Not superficial.
 - Not thorny.
 - Fruitful to receive the Word of God and let it become fruitful within.
- The second thing is yoking. Christ wants to yoke us to himself in humble, meek, cruciform love. He wants to renew us.
 - "I make all things new"
 - He wants always to restore us to the zeal of our first love. He said in the Book of Revelation to the Church in Ephesus, "The one who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks in the midst of the seven gold lampstands says this: 'I know your works, your labor, and your endurance, and that you cannot tolerate the wicked; you have tested those who call themselves apostles but are not, and discovered that they are impostors. Moreover, you have endurance and have suffered for my name, and you have not grown weary. Yet I hold this against you: you have lost the love you had at first.'" To the extent that that applies to us, because of the miles on the pastoral tires, he wants to give us that renewal. To make things fresh, renewed, new and improved.
 - For that to occur, requires our cooperation. One of the most important ways he does that is returning our souls to their baptismal splendor in a good confession.
 - But there's also going back to the beginning, and that brings us to the theme of this week's retreat.
- Renewing and Strengthening the Resolve.
 - Joy of being at Adam Parker's ordination. Not often at ordinations of bishops, but rather installations. Got to the part of the interrogation that Archbishop Lori did of Bishops-elect Parker and Brennan and I was struck by the nine questions, what they involved, what a bishop commits to beyond his baptismal, diaconal and priestly promises.

- Talked to Bishop Loverde afterward. He was going to start preaching retreats. I asked him if I could ask a question: how often there were retreats on the promises made by bishops. I anticipated he would say that it was a staid and worn out topic. He surprised me by saying he had never heard a retreat like that and encouraged me to do it.
- Meditating on these nine promises were doubtless part of your retreat prior to ordination. It is probably something you revisit on your anniversary. The experience of being a bishop obviously enriches these themes in ways that anyone who's not a bishop would not be able to understand. At the same time, looking them at the eyes of someone who has really never pondered them might allow a fresh perspective, to help God who has begun the good work to bring it to perfection. And so that's what I propose we do. We'll cover each of the nine promises, nine commitments, nine resolutions a bishop publicly declares. We won't do it in the sequence in which they're asked. We won't focus on all parts of each resolution equally. But I hope through these nine themes:
 - Perseverance
 - Preaching
 - Guarding the Treasure of the Deposit of Faith
 - Building up the Body of Christ in Unity
 - Faithful Obedience
 - Guiding as Devoted Fathers along the Way of Salvation
 - Welcoming the Poor, Strangers and Needy with Mercy
 - Seeking out the Lost Sheep
 - Praying without Ceasing and Living without Reproach
- To help each of us, including those of us who are not bishops, to yoke ourselves more to Christ the Eternal High Priest in each of these ways, as we spend this time with him in this deserted place.
- Our last meditation, on Friday morning, will be dedicated to our Lady and her role in our life and in our constantly call to renewal. Just like the Church is *semper reformanda*, so all of us in the Church and who serve the Church.
- And we turn to her and ask, "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death."