

16 (B)

A man was caught in a snow blizzard in Alaska. His truck left the road, and he ended up a long way from the main highway. It was getting dark and it seemed pointless to walk through the snow to seek help, so he decided to await the morning light before taking any action. When he woke up in the morning his truck was completely frozen shut and covered in snow. It took six days before he was spotted and rescued. When he was rescued he was asked what he did during those six long days. He replied with all seriousness. 'I did an awful lot of thinking and praying.'

I hope none of us will find ourselves in such extreme circumstances before we start thinking and praying. As catholic Christians, however, we should reserve some quiet time each day for quiet contemplation. Maybe Jesus had this in mind when he said to the apostles; 'come away to some lonely place all by yourselves and rest awhile'.

Over the next few weeks lots of people will spend time away with family or friends. Many will head abroad. Sad to say, most chase the sun and the sand more to indulge their bodies rather than refresh their souls. Today's psalm puts it like this: 'near restful waters he leads me to revive my drooping spirit', not my drooping body. But those 'restful waters' refer more to an inner stillness rather than an actual place. Jesus said: 'when you pray, go to your private room, shut the door and pray to your Father, who is in that secret place'? Our 'private room', our 'secret place' refers to time spent in quiet contemplation before God where I can open my innermost self to Him, rather than an actual place

Perhaps many people would not see this as all that important – some might even regard it as a waste of time. However, those same people might think nothing of frittering away precious hours before the telly each night without even a flicker of guilt.

Even we priests can become so immersed in the work of the Lord that we forget the Lord of the work. A young priest once asked Saint Mother Theresa of Calcutta how he might become a better priest. She said: 'you won't go far wrong if you spend some time each day in quiet contemplation before our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament'.

Activism or being busy is often seen by this generation as a commendable quality to have, but it may be little more than a smokescreen for our unwillingness to move beyond the material to the transcendent, the divine. Pope Benedict bemoaned the fact that our age has repressed the sense of God and of the transcendent. The entire realm of religion, faith and God, the domain of spirituality, is banished from everyday life or marginalised. Our spiritual side has been repressed. This is the new neurosis of our time – this is our deep wound, the Pope said. All kinds of repression are bad for us psychologically but to repress our spiritual side is quiet damaging.

Unlike Jesus and the apostles, perhaps we cannot go away to some lonely place but God is everywhere and a quiet time spent with Him is not beyond the bounds of possibility for even the busiest person. As always, the choice is ours.