Saturday of the 4th week in Ordinary Time

Date: Saturday, February 7, 2026 I **Season:** Ordinary Time before Easter I **Year:** A
First Reading: 1 Kings 3:4–13
Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 119:9–14 I **Response:** Psalm 119:12b
Gospel Acclamation: John 10:27
Gospel Reading: Mark 6:30–34
Preached at: the Chapel of Emmaus House **in the** Archdiocese of Harare, Zimbabwe**.**

W e can recall that the disciples have just returned from the mission Jesus entrusted to them. He sent them out two by two, with little more than a staff and his authority. They have preached repentance, anointed the sick, and driven out unclean spirits. They have known the thrill of being welcomed and the sting of being turned away. Now they crowd around Jesus, eager to tell him all they have done and taught. It is at this moment, when energy is high and tiredness is real, that Jesus says to them, Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest for a while.

Jesus understands what has just happened to them. He knows how easy it is, after a busy stretch of ministry, to lose your bearings. He also knows how fatigue can quietly harden the heart. So he invites them away, not to escape the world, but to be with him again. It is something like going on retreat. You step back from the noise, the demands, the expectations, not because they do not matter, but because you need space to listen to God more honestly, to remember why you are doing what you are doing.

But the 'retreat' does not go as planned. The people see where they are heading and arrive before them. The quiet is interrupted. When Jesus steps out of the boat, he is met once again by a great crowd. And here the Gospel lets us see what moves him. He is filled with pity for them, because they are like sheep without a shepherd. This is not surface sympathy. It is something deep and physical. Their need reaches him at the centre.

Jesus does not react with frustration. He does not insist on protecting his rest. He responds to what is in front of him. He begins to teach them. Before anything else, he gives them meaning and direction. He knows that their deepest hunger is not first for food, but for guidance, for a word that helps them make sense of their lives. His compassion is not just a feeling. It becomes action.

The first reading shows us a similar moment of listening. Solomon is young and aware of how much he does not know. God invites him to ask for whatever he wants. Solomon could have asked for strength, success, or security. Instead, he asks for an understanding heart, the ability to listen well and judge rightly for the sake of the people, to discern according to God's will. God is pleased, because this is not a prayer focused on the self. It is a prayer shaped by responsibility and care for others.

That same listening heart is what we see in Jesus. Wisdom here is not about being clever or impressive. It is about learning how to attend. Attending to God, as Solomon does. Attending to people, as Jesus does. And also attending to oneself, noticing fatigue, desire, fear, and motive. Leadership in God's way begins there: with openness rather than defensiveness, with the willingness to receive before rushing to act.

The psalm shows us the quiet daily practice that makes this possible. How does a person keep their life on track? By holding close to God's word and letting it sink into the heart. Not as an idea, but as something lived with. This is how our hearts are slowly shaped to look more like the heart of Jesus, the Sacred Heart that listens, feels, and responds with love. It does not happen quickly or dramatically. It grows through simple habits. Prayer at the start of the day. Gratitude as the day goes on. A moment of reflection before sleep. Little by little, the heart is formed, softened, and taught how to love as He loves.

There is also a challenge here for us. Jesus values rest and invites his friends into it. But he does not cling to it. When love requires his presence, he gives it. Some people avoid involvement and protect themselves too much. Others never stop giving and wear themselves down. Jesus shows another rhythm. He withdraws to pray, and he returns to serve. Discernment is learning when to step back and when to step forward, guided not by comfort, but by love.

In our own context, many people are worn out. Economic pressure, uncertainty about work, strain within families, frustration with systems that do not seem to work. People still look for direction, for someone who will take them seriously, for a word that does not dismiss their struggle. This Gospel reminds us that faith is lived close to people, with attention and patience, not at a safe distance.

As we pray with this scene, place yourself there. Hear the disciples speaking all at once. Feel their tiredness. Watch the crowd arrive. Notice what Jesus does. Notice how he looks at the people. Let his way of seeing slowly shape our own.

As we pray this morning, let us consider the following questions:

- Where is Jesus inviting me to step back, as if on retreat, so that I can listen more deeply to God?
- Whose need am I tempted to avoid because it interrupts my plans or my rest?
- If God were to ask me today, as he asked Solomon, what I want most, what would my answer say about my priorities and my trust in him?

In preparing this homily, I consulted various resources to deepen my understanding of today's readings, including using Magisterium AI for assistance. The final content remains the responsibility of the author.