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St. Raphael, Springdale, AR

One of the finest books on leadership was written by John C. Maxwell and it's called *Developing the Leader Within You*. Maxwell was the pastor of Skyline Baptist Church in California, and his church had over 5000 members. (You know, a medium-size church.) Maxwell worked hard to get to know all his parishioners. Among the various things he did to connect with his members, one especially stood out to me. He said: "I try to walk slowly through the crowd," Now, that jumped out at me because quite frankly I never do that! I'm usually running on my way to the hospital or because I'm late for a meeting. But what a wonderful habit to develop: "walking slowly through the crowd." You see, when you do that you tell people that you have time for them, they are important to you, you want to get to know them. That's one thing I've noticed about Msgr. Scott Friend: he always has time to stop and talk to you; that's also why he's chronically late to everything. Bishop Sartain had that rare ability too: he never appeared to be in a rush, even when he was. When we slow down and spend time with other people, we not only get to know them, we also experience a special moment of grace because we allow God to touch our lives through that person.

In the first reading today Abraham asks three strangers to spend a little time with him. It was a hot afternoon and the 3 men were obviously on their way somewhere else. But Abraham says to them: "Sir, if I may ask you this favor, please do not go on past

your servant.” In other words, Abraham invites them to take a few moments of their time and spend it with him. He treats them with great hospitality, and in return the 3 men promise that in a year’s time Abraham’s wife will be pregnant. You see, this apparently chance encounter became a moment of grace and blessing. Why? All because Abraham asked those men to slow down and spend some time with him. Spending quality time with others can be a moment of great grace: God works through other people to bless us.

I’ll never forget how Fr. Correnti taught me the importance of just being with people, especially when they are in need. While I was at Holy Trinity Seminary in Dallas, Fr. Correnti was the rector of the seminary. One evening I became extremely sick and had a severe headache, fever and I couldn’t keep anything down. I lay in bed and wondered if I would see the light of another day. That whole miserable, endless night, Fr. Correnti stayed by my bed. Sometimes I would wake up and there he’d be praying the rosary or telling me that I was going to be all right. I can’t put into words what comfort that was to me: to know that Fr. Correnti was there for me. That night became a real moment of grace for me because Fr. Correnti taught me what a real priest is: he is someone who “walks slowly through the crowd;” he’s someone who stays by your sick bed all night. Those of you who knew Fr. Correnti remember that he always took the time to be present to us, to show us that we were important to him. I wonder what would have happened if we had taken more time to be with him, to show him

how important he was to us. Perhaps he would have experienced a moment of grace through us.

My friends we live in a fast-paced, hectic world in which we rush from one activity to another. There are not many people these days who “walk slowly through the crowd.” And I have to say I’m as guilty as the next guy. We rush out of Mass with Holy Communion still in our mouths because we don’t have time for Jesus. We curse and complain at slow drivers on 540 – and sometimes that slow driver is me! I love to see their reaction when they see me sitting there with a Roman collar on. We are too busy to spend quality time with family and friends. There’s a song that captures what’s really at stake when we rush through life, called “Cats in the Cradle.” Let me share a few lines.

My child arrived just the other day
He came into the world in the usual way
But there were planes to catch and bills to pay
He learned to walk while I was away
And he was talkin’ ‘fore I knew it, and as he grew
He’d say “I’m gonna be like you dad
You know I’m gonna be like you.”

My son turned ten just the other day
He said, “Thanks for the ball, Dad, come on let’s play
Can you teach me to throw,” I said, “Not today
I got a lot to do,” he said, “That’s o.k.”
And he walked away but his smile never dimmed
And said, “I’m gonna be like him, yeah,
You know I’m gonna be like him.”

I’ve long since retired, my son’s moved away
I called him up just the other day
I said, “I’d like to see you if you don’t mind”

He said, "I'd love to Dad, if I can find the time
You see my new job's a hassle and the kids have the flu
But it's sure nice talking to you, Dad,
It's been sure nice talking to you."
And as I hung up the phone it occurred to me
He'd grown up just like me
My boy was just like me.

The tragic lesson of this song is that the father and son never had time for each other. And therefore, God was not able to use one as a source of blessing for the other. Hebrews 13: 2 talks about what Abraham did for those 3 strangers when it says: "Do not neglect hospitality, for through it some have unknowingly entertained angels." If we, too, can learn to "walk slowly through the crowd," who knows who we might encounter.

Praised be Jesus Christ!