

A few weeks ago, all the priests of the archdiocese were at our annual convocation at Ocean Shores. One afternoon I was taking a walk on the beach, looking at the debris left by the tides. Along the wet sand there are always many dismembers crabs, kelp, razor clam shells -- and broken sand dollars. That day it suddenly occurred to me that I had never seen a whole sand dollar – except in people’s homes or in beachcombers’ shops.

So, I decided that was the day I would keep my eyes open and down. There were many broken “tests” (the sand dollar is actually the skeleton or “test” of a kind of sea urchin). But not too long after I began, I found an intact sand dollar! Aha! I cleaned it off and held it carefully in my hand. I would take the treasure home. And then, just moments later, I saw another one. Two in one day! This was amazing. I saved that sand dollar too. But I kept up my hunt – and a while later saw a third whole sand dollar in the sand. I took this as a special sign of grace and blessing from God on me. What are the

chances that I would find three of the rare sand dollars in less than a half hour – after I had bemoaned the fact that I had never seen a complete sand dollar in the wild? God is so good.

But then it struck me . . . well, maybe that meant the sand dollars aren't really so rare – and finding those three sand dollars in a row wasn't that miraculous. Maybe It was just that this time I had finally actually looked for them. Wasn't it more likely that beautiful sand dollars had been at my feet on all my previous beach walks – I just hadn't noticed?

In our Gospel today we have the story of Martha and Mary. Martha is busy with many good things – serving Jesus! But Mary is focused on Jesus Himself. Of course, the work of serving Jesus and others is good. But in commending Mary's attention on Him (“Mary has chosen the better part”), Jesus wants to make the point that we must also not be so caught up in the things and tasks of the world –

even good ones – that we're distracted from Him and miss the marvelous things He is doing every day in our lives.

Was finding those beautiful sand dollars a sign of God's blessing on my life, or was I just oblivious to their presence on my previous walks because I wasn't paying close attention? Why not both?

Think of my decision that day on the beach to look for intact sand dollars in terms of prayer. A prayer time can be thought of as taking a spiritual walk with God – and paying attention to what is passing by in our thought, feelings and desires. Jesus tries desperately to get us to Look at Him. To see Him. We miss Him – perhaps even come to disbelieve in His presence or very existence because we won't pay attention. It's not that He isn't trying to communicate – think of all my previous walks on the beach when I may have walked past beautiful sand dollars, oblivious.

God's signs to us are all around – not so rare – but we rarely notice them. But if we do notice them, we will find them striking, beautiful evidence of His constant presence and love.

There is a well-known incident in the life of St. John Vianney. This patron saint of parish priests said, “When I first came to Ars, there was a man who never passed the church without going in. In the morning on his way to work, and in the evening on his way home, he left his spade and pickax in the porch and spent a long time in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. I asked him one day what he said to Our Lord during the long visits he made. Do you know what he told me? ‘Oh, Monsieur le Cure, I say nothing to Him. I look at Him and He looks at me.’”

How can we gain a greater sense of Jesus' divine presence in our lives? We first need to give Him our attention. We need to look at Him with the eyes of our soul. On that day on the beach, I deliberately decided to focus. Well, God has given us the Sabbath

Day rest for the same purpose. How many of us really focus on God on Sunday? Do we even prayerful attend the Eucharist every Sunday? What about the rest of the day? Does God get a special focus on our Sundays?

What about daily attention on God. Remember that elderly French farmer of Ars. Every day he took time from his labor and looked at God with the eye of his soul. "I look at Him and He looks at me." That is what I'm trying to get across when I beg you to spend 20 minutes a day with Jesus – especially in adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Make time in a day to stop and look at God.

Here is another possible help: perhaps at the top of each hour, we stop for just a few seconds and ask this question, "Jesus, how are you loving me at this moment?" Not: "Jesus, are you loving me at this moment?" - because He is! We just need to discover how He is doing it concretely at that particular moment to become aware of being blessed: Like three sand dollars in less than 30 minutes!

Consider that truth of Jesus' constant blessing and appreciate it.

Perhaps Jesus is loving me in the company I'm in – or the weather, or the health I'm experiencing – or even the cross He is offering me to carry for others . . . but there is some grace in the present moment.

Those three sand dollars I found are now resting on my bookshelf in the living room of the rectory. They truly are simple, intricate, beautiful. I put them there for a purpose. They are a reminder to me that God's grace-filled actions surround me – if I will just look.