

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time B - Prayer and Action, The Two Poles of Christian Life
July 18, 2021.

In this Sunday's Gospel reading (Mark 6:36-40), Jesus' Apostles had completed their first successful missionary endeavour. After being with him for a long time, under his tutelage and guidance, they had been sent out to be his ambassadors, to announce his message and testify to its truth. Now they returned to report their progress. We know from the other evangelists that this moment of reunion was full of rejoicing and energy - they had experienced the power of God working through them, moving people's hearts through their words and deeds. And now Christ takes them aside to rest, to be with him again in the quiet intimacy of their small community. What he says is: "**Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.**" In other words, he tells them to take a break to devote some time to being rather than doing. Often he tells us the same thing too. Jesus has his reasons for inviting his disciples, and us Christians to rest. The disciples were on the move, calling people to repentance, casting out demons, anointing the sick. It was work they had never done before, and once they returned, I bet they must be exhausted. As the Gospel reports, many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. Does that scene sound familiar to you? Is your workplace like that? Is your home like that? This is a common experience for people today. Many are coming and going, and they too have no leisure even to eat. Jesus is always busy too, placing the needs of others before his own. But he always takes time away to a deserted place to pray and talks to his Father. We too should follow his example of taking time off to listen to the healing voice of God and refresh ourselves spiritually.

We Christians who are energetically engaged in evangelizing the world around us, need to balance our activity with contemplation, For us, taking a rest doesn't mean to be a couch potato after supper, eating popcorns, drinking beer and watching TV. **It means we can spend some time in personal conversation with the Lord.** Maybe take a leisure walk after supper. Listening to what God is telling us in the warm glow of the beautiful sunset or through the gentle touch of the breeze on our face: **giving God gratitude for our accomplishments and asking for advice for things that we fail to do.** Sometimes we wonder why we get so emotionally and spiritually exhausted by the busy-ness of our lives. It's because we aren't **recharging our spiritual batteries.** Stress, discouragement, and other crippling emotions can wear us out if we aren't daily reinforcing our faith in Jesus Christ. We might even run into the danger of wandering off and finding other pathways such as sex, drugs and alcohol more attractive. **Only our friendship with Christ can supply us with the energy, strength and wisdom we need to be truly successful, not just in the roles we play, but in who we are beneath those roles. Without prayer, study, and time alone with God, our well will soon run dry.** We will have nothing substantial to offer others. But without action, without giving freely to others what we have freely received from God, our spiritual waters will become stagnant, lifeless, like a lake with no outlet. **Contemplation and action, prayer and work - such was Christ's way, so such should be every Christian's way.**

Think of a Hockey team. Hockey players are experts in action - fast action, hard-hitting action, speed and power and dexterity. But when a hockey team goes onto the field, how does it organize and direct all that physical potential? By following a game plan, a strategy, a vision for victory. For every one minute on the ice during a game, the team invests hours and hours of practice, film analysis, discussion, and strategic thinking. That's what keeps the players united, focused, and motivated during the heat of the competition: they know what they are there for, what challenges they will be facing, what path to take to come out victorious. Sometimes it even happens that the bigger, faster, stronger team loses, because the other team had a better game plan, a better vision, and executed it better. A similar pattern occurs in our spiritual life. Every

day we are battling against temptations, difficulties, and obstacles to fulfilling our life mission in Christ. And it is easy for us to get worn down, confused and disconcerted by the struggle. **But if we spend time with the Lord in prayer, if we meet regularly with the Holy Spirit, our head coach and personal trainer, we will be able to win those battles. In prayer our faith-vision is renewed, our injuries are healed, our weaknesses are strengthened, and our victory is assured.** As Pope Benedict put it "**One who prays is not afraid; one who prays is never alone; one who prays is saved!**" (Pope Benedict XVI, Wednesday audience, 1 July 2009).

Prayer and action, these are like the two sides of the coin in our Christian life. But even though both are equally important for our spiritual maturity, in today's world one of them is harder to achieve than the other. Today's society is so focused on getting things done, on task lists and action points and bottom lines, that many people have actually lost sight of which things are really worthwhile doing and why. The fast and superficial pace of life in the digital world makes prayer harder and harder, because prayer requires internal discipline and depth. These weeks in the liturgical season of Ordinary Time (between Easter and the next Advent) are the perfect time to improve our prayer life. All of our life is sacred but we will never understand this unless we accept our Lord's loving invitation to come apart and rest a while. And God will certainly help us, if we just give him the chance. One way to do that is to make a commitment to a regular prayer life. We need to pray daily, to have a daily quiet time when we can speak to Christ, pray for our loved ones, reflect on the scriptures, or read some good, solid spiritual books. It can be just ten minutes in the morning and ten minutes at night as a start - but it has to be consistent, and that means self-discipline.

We have just come through a weird sixteen months: social distancing, no real gathering to stand around the Lord's table and to share his loaf and his cup with our sisters and brothers. Without the pandemic we may not appreciate the eucharistic at our own table and will miss the thanksgiving as a fundamental feature of our lives – thankful for our lives, our health, our loved ones, our neighbours, all who care for the sick, those who make life livable – then we just might miss the fundamental Christian vision. **God is here, the risen one is among us in our lives.** And it is from out of the ordinariness of our lives that through Jesus, with Jesus and in Jesus that we must act Eucharistically. **The Christian "new normal" is that we can engage in the fundamental expression of our attitude to God – thankfulness – at our shared tables.** Now that the pre-pandemic normal has been resumed and everything is back as of 16 months ago, all parishes begin to reopen. The celebration of Mass will look very similar to pre-pandemic time. Hospitality after Mass can take place. Adorations of the Blessed Sacrament is permitted. My wife's Faith sharing group resumes the weekly sharing again. The Lord graciously hears and answers our prayers!!! **Christ wants us to stay close to him through prayer, so that with him we will be able to do great things for his Kingdom.**