

Renewed Strength

*The Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany (5 February 2012)
Saint Mark 1:29-39; Isaiah 40:21-31*

Dearly beloved, who of you does not look forward to a little rest and relaxation? Let's face it, your job is demanding. People to please. Deadlines to meet. Reports to get done. And meetings to attend. And just when you think your day is over, there's rush hour to face. Dinner to make. Laundry to do. Groceries to buy. Kids to run here and there. A conflict to resolve. And bills to pay. And just to keep things interesting, the faucet is leaking. Your car needs servicing. And a loved one is facing a crisis and needs your help. Yes, you lead a busy life. Your calendar is too full. That's why you are weary. That's why you are exhausted. That's why you crave a little rest and relaxation, a good night's sleep, the weekend, even a couple days away. It's the cure for busyness. Or so you think.

Our Lord lived a busy life too, you know. That is very evident from today's Holy Gospel. After spending much of the Sabbath in the synagogue, where He taught with authority and cast out an unclean spirit from a man, Jesus enters the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Perhaps He was looking forward to a few quiet hours. But lo and behold, a need arises. Without a complaint, Jesus approaches Simon's mother-in-law, who is ill with a fever, takes her by the hand, lifts her up, and heals her. At sundown, rather than going out on the town, the town comes to Jesus and gathers outside His door. This included the sick and those oppressed by demons. So much for a relaxing Saturday evening!

The next morning, Jesus will be greeted by His disciples with an urgent message: **"Everyone is looking for You."** His reply: **"Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out."** So off He goes throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues the good news of the kingdom of God.

How did Jesus do it? How did He face a busy schedule without growing weary and heavy laden? Without becoming exhausted? Without getting drained? The answer is right in today's Holy Gospel. But first, back to you and your weariness.

The pressures of life aren't the only things that weary you, you know. You also have to deal with your sinful flesh. The selfishness within. The anger that gets the best of you. The lust, envy, pride, and covetousness. The battle wages on day in

and day out. The devil does not grow weary in tempting you. The world does not grow weary in enticing you. Their troops are always fresh and their weapons always find their mark. But you do grow weary. Your sinful flesh wants to waive the white flag of surrender and indulge in the temptation of the moment. In your struggle against the Old Adam, in your weariness during the battle, do you think that God has forgotten you, that your way is hidden from Him?

Isaiah has some good news for you. The Creator of the ends of the earth has sent His only-begotten Son to the front line to join you in the trenches, to fight with you and for you, to defeat the enemy you had no chance of defeating on your own. And win the victory Jesus has by means of His perfect life, His sacrificial death, and His glorious resurrection.

Have you not known? Have you not heard? There is One who never grows weary of hearing your pleas for mercy, One who never grows weary of forgiving your sins, One who never grows weary of strengthening your faith. That One is the same Jesus Christ who defeated your enemies on the cross. But He only gives power to the faint and only increases strength to him who has no might. That's humbling, isn't it. God does not help those who help themselves. He only helps the helpless. He only exalts the humble. He only binds up the broken and contrite heart. He only gives strength to the weary.

Like you, the blessed Martin Luther also grew weary. This morning's text taught him to confess: "We get tired and are worn out by Satan's plotting and cunning tricks. But you have a God who does not get tired. He will set you free from the incessant stratagems of Satan. Satan and the world are our relentless enemies. They keep after us until at last they exhaust us. Here God consoles those who labor and are wearied: 'I will not become weary. I have always been active, I am fresh and new. I can help you.'" [Luther's Works XVII 30]

And that brings us back to Isaiah, who concludes with these words: **"They who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint."**

In the midst of your busyness, look to Christ. See how He waited for the Lord. After a very busy Sabbath, Jesus woke up very early on Sunday morning, while it was still dark, and went out to a quiet place. Not to play golf. Not to curl up with the good book. Not even for the ever popular "me time." No! He went to a quiet, desolate place to pray to His Father. And in praying to His Father, Jesus was being renewed in strength and being mounted up with wings like eagles, so that as His

feet led Him from town to town to preach the Gospel, He would not grow weary or faint. Do you suppose there's something you can learn from Him?

When the disciples finally woke up, they searched everywhere for Jesus. When they finally found Him, they exclaimed: **“Everyone is looking for You.”** To which Jesus replied: **“Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.”**

Some are looking for Jesus for the right reasons. Some for the wrong reasons. But everyone needs what Jesus came to give. That's why He preaches and teaches and proclaims the kingdom of God. He continues from town to town, delivering good news, forgiving sins, healing brokenness, and strengthening feeble lives.

As you can see, Jesus' life never ceased being busy. In fact, His final week was the busiest of them all. Preaching. Teaching. Warning. Healing. Instituting a new and better Supper. Singing hymns. Praying for strength and faithfulness. Confessing the truth. Receiving the world's spite. Being forsaken by His Father. Speaking seven beautiful words. And then proclaiming victory as He breathes His last. And then, a new week dawned. And again He is busy. Proclaiming victory. Speaking peace. Appearing to His own. Establishing the holy office of the ministry. All of this—His dying and rising again—He did for you!

Do you see now why Jesus woke up early and prayed? It gave Him renewed strength to preach. That is, after all, why He came.

Just as Jesus' task was to preach, yours is to listen. So be found regularly on the receiving end of Jesus' preaching. Here in His house the busyness of life stops, and the business of forgiveness, life, and salvation gets done. Here He pardons you for all the times you are too busy, not busy enough, or busy with the wrong things. Here He renews your strength. Here in Word and Supper He stoops down to you that He might bear you up with wings like eagles to your heavenly Father.

Remember that as you face a full calendar, as you juggle the responsibilities of family and work, chores and errands, commitments and involvements. When weariness comes, and it will, renew your strength in Christ. Renew your strength in His words of absolution, with every word that proceeds from His mouth, and with His body and blood. In these will you find the forgiveness, peace, and strength your weary soul so desperately needs.

In the name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Jesus Christ unto life everlasting.

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