

**SERMON ON THE EIGHT SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST - 18 JULY 2021**

**COLLECT FOR THE DAY:**

**O God,  
you sent your Son to heal and to bring peace;  
give us the stillness that restores our spirits  
and the grace that brings healing;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
who lives and reigns with you and the  
Holy Spirit,  
One God, now and for ever.  
Amen.**

May I speak in the name of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

Let us pray:

Heavenly Father, we come before you this morning distraught and utterly devastated by what we have witnessed in our country in the last couple of days. We ask you to please forgive us our sins and not punish us with your wrath. We know that we have sinned against you by what we have left undone as some areas in our country went up in flames and your people were subjected to the worst forms of trauma. Ignite in us the spirit of love and compassion so that we may bring hope and healing among your people, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

In the gospel according to St Mark chapter 6, we read in the 31<sup>st</sup> verse about Jesus asking his disciples to come with him by themselves “to a quiet place and get some rest”. We will recall that in the previous verses of this chapter, which were read two Sundays ago, Jesus had sent his disciples out two by two with clear instructions on what they had to do and that he gave them authority over impure spirits. They had now returned from that assignment and were giving Jesus reports on what they had done as well as what they had taught. In essence, they were accounting to Jesus on their deployment and how they had carried out their mission.

Going through this section of today’s gospel reading, I just could not help but think of that fateful day when I would stand in front of my Lord to give account of how I have carried out his instructions, how I have fulfilled my purpose on earth, whether indeed I understood my roles and responsibilities as a Christian or whether I was merely going about my daily life without focusing on God’s mission for me!

When we look at the scriptures, we learn that the notion of rest after one had done some work came from God himself. In the book of Genesis chapter 2 verses 2 and 3 we learn that “By the seventh day

God had finished the work he had been doing, so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because he rested from all the work of creating that he had done". In essence, God who created us knew from the very beginning that we would get worn out and weary and that we would need physical rest. Hence, he even declared the day that he rested holy and expected of us to rest on that day. God therefore did not create us for a perpetually busy life. He created us to have time to rest and recharge our batteries.

We read in Mark chapter 6 verse 31 that so many people were coming and going that the disciples did not have a chance to eat and that when Jesus saw this, he called them to a quiet place to go and get some rest. This is contrary to how we have come to live our lives in today's world. We cherish a busy life such that we have become accustomed to it. Our diaries are filled with appointments from morning until well into the night. Sometimes even as we lie in bed, our minds are thinking of what we would do the next day.

I have heard of and seen people who go to the extent of waking up early in the morning to go through their email communication before they even go to work. Others would be so busy during the day that they set time aside in the evening to go through and respond to their emails. We seem not to want to have a vacuum in a day - a less busy day has come to mean no productivity. We measure our success by how busy our lives are.

We are taught in today's gospel reading that we need to take time and rest. First, Jesus asks his disciples to go with him. In other words, Jesus teaches that we should rest in him. In the gospel according to St Matthew chapter 11 verses 28 and 29 Jesus makes a clarion call to all of us who are weary and burdened to come to him and he promises that when we do so, he would give us rest. In verse 29 Jesus says, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." It is not just the physical fatigue that Jesus promises to relieve us from but also the exhaustion of the soul.

As we go through and witness the devastating effects of the third wave of the Corona-Virus pandemic, seeing our loved ones suffering and being unable to ease their pain, our souls get fatigued. For some, the souls are weary from mourning the loss of loved ones, people we grew up with and others who were our colleagues. Jesus promises us that in him, we will find rest for our fatigued souls. He is our hope as we traverse the pandemic and its harmful effects. The Psalmist confirms this when he laments

in chapter 62 verse 1 that “Truly my soul finds rest in God; my salvation comes from him.” Let us seize the opportunity, respond to his call, and lean on Jesus for the guaranteed healing of our souls.

Next Jesus asks his disciples to go with him to a quiet place. In other words, it is not feasible to find rest in the midst of the hustle and bustle that we go through in our everyday busy lives. Jesus himself had practiced solitude and silence, often leaving his disciples behind, and going off to a quiet place so that he could be with his Father in a special way, praying and listening to him. We learn in various sections of the gospels how Jesus would go to a solitary place and pray (Mark 1 vs 35). When he heard of John the Baptist’s beheading, we learn in Matthew 14 verse 13 that Jesus withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Again, John tells us in chapter 6 verse 15 that when Jesus knew how the crowd he had fed with five loaves of bread and two pieces of fish wanted to make him king by force, he withdrew to a mountain by himself.

Indeed, it is in a solitude and silent space that we are able to find God and connect with him. The prophet Elijah did not find God in a powerful wind, nor did he find God in an earthquake or in a raging fire. It was in a gentle whisper that Elijah heard God’s voice (1 Kings 19 vs 11-12). Moses also assured the Israelites as they had given up hope and had resigned themselves to be killed by the Egyptians that they should be still and wait upon the Lord to rescue them. Moses told the Israelites that the Egyptians they saw coming after them, they would never see them again. That sounded like a pipe dream at the time like what would sound if someone were to tell us that the devastating pandemic we see today killing people in their millions, we will not see again. However, it is true that we should be still and know that God is always in control.

The late Thomas Keating who founded the Contemplative Prayer movement makes an analogy of the four elements of connecting with God through centering prayer to a capsule one takes towards curing an illness. The four elements that Thomas Keating talks about are 1. Solitude, 2. Silence, 3. Simplicity of Life, and 4. Discipline for prayer and action.

It is the first two of these elements that we have learnt today about Jesus calling his disciples to practise so that they can get rest. Of course, the simplicity of life and discipline for prayer and action enables us to draw closer to God and be his ambassadors on earth, bringing love, hope and healing to his people. The aftermath of the tragic events we saw happening in some parts of our country in the past few days is the first port of call for us to take action and lend a hand. As we go to our places of

solitude, let us remember to pray for our country, its people and for its leaders. Let us demand God to rebuke the devil and free our country of all evil.

In celebration of the International Mandela Day, for the rest of this Mandela month let us spend 67 minutes a day in solitude and silence, listening to God as he directs us on what he expects of us, on his purpose for our lives. Mandela once said, "What counts in life is not the mere fact that we lived; it is what difference we have made to the lives of others that will determine the significance of the life we lead."

May we find God's voice in silence and solitude and rest in him, in Jesus' name AMEN.

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