

In early 2015, I was blessed to be able to take a trip to the Holy Land with my fellow classmates from the seminary. It was an amazing trip filled with awe-inspiring moments of walking where Jesus walked and participating in Mass at many Holy sites, including Jesus' tomb. You will hear more about that trip in future homilies. Today I want to focus on my return home from the Holy Land.

It was quite the adventure, as we spent almost 12 hours in a plane crossing the Atlantic and then came to find out that our connecting flight to Ohio was cancelled. So we found ourselves fairly jetlagged and stuck in Newark, New Jersey for the evening. That evening was special because the Buckeyes had made it to the National Championship that year and the game was that night. Being an Ohio State graduate, I was obviously excited to watch the game, in spite of my travel weariness. So I gathered in our hotel room in Newark with several of my fellow Ohio State fans from the seminary and we watched the Bucks beat the Ducks to become national champions.

If you remember, the game stretched late into the night. So after the celebrating with each other and watching the postgame coverage until the wee hours of the morning, me and my friends realized that we weren't going to go to bed, because the priest in charge of our group had scheduled us for the earliest flight out the next morning and wanted us at the airport bright and early. By the time we were done celebrating, it was almost time to leave for the airport.

By the time I finally made it back to the seminary in Ohio, I had been on a transatlantic flight for over 11 hours with only fitful sleep, had stayed up all night watching and celebrating the Buckeyes, and then slept for maybe a half an hour on the airport floor and then a little on the short flight from Newark to Columbus. Suffice it to say, I was ready for some real sleep. I went up to my dorm room, blacked out the window with a dark blanket, and slept for 14 hours straight.

There is really only so far we can push our bodies. They have the need for that rhythm of activity and rest. Science calls this 'circadian rhythms.' When we mess around with those natural rhythms, our bodies tend to push back. My body knew that it needed a time to reset after the frenzy of all that sleepless travel and activity.

What is true for our bodies is also true for our souls. In our depths, we have that rhythm of activity and rest. When we start to try to mess with that rhythm, it is not pretty. Jesus was well aware of this need. As God made man, He knew well the limits of his own human nature and that of His followers. He was able to recognize those times where the Apostles needed to rest.

The Gospel for this Sunday picks up right where we left off last Sunday. We rejoin the Apostles after they are returning from their travels to spread the Good News of the Kingdom. We heard last week that Jesus sent the Apostles out two by two healing people and even driving out demons in His name. I can imagine how excited they must have been as they returned and were relating these stories to Jesus.

But Jesus knew that all this activity had drained them and that they would need some time for refreshment, to simply recharge their spiritual batteries in peace and quiet with Him. So he invites them to come away to a deserted place to rest a while. Although we hear that the crowds beat them to the place looking for Jesus, I imagine that Jesus had the Apostles remain on the boat and rest while He went out to teach the crowds. He knew that the crowds needed Him to shepherd them at that time, but He also knew that the Apostles needed rest.

Rest is something we have largely forgotten about in our busy world. We tend to try to squeeze as much juice out of the orange of life as possible and only stop to rest when we are exhausted. And when we do stop to rest, we tend to try to recharge our batteries in front of the TV or on our smartphone. And there isn't anything wrong with this, but true rest comes from something deeper than TV, Netflix or social media. In our depths, our hearts long for the rest that only God can give us.

Through the Church, God gives us the Sunday obligation: that expectation to come to Mass every weekend unless there is a serious reason not to. And this isn't meant to be onerous, but to remind us of our need to come away and rest awhile with Jesus. It is here, around this altar, that we can find the rest that truly refreshes our souls. Here in Mass, we feed on what our souls long for: the living Word of God in scripture and Jesus, the Word made flesh in the Holy Eucharist. At the one table of God's word and His Body, we find that rest and refreshment that our souls need.

Mass isn't so much about what happens externally, because externally things are very simple, but internally, there is so much happening here. Externally, we hear readings which we may have heard many times before, read by people we are familiar with. Internally, God wants to mold our hearts with His words of life in Sacred Scripture. If we cooperate with His grace, these seemingly ordinary words can break down those habits of sin which we hide away and build up virtue and newness of life in our depths. They can bring us comfort, confidence, hope and healing.

Above all, the rest that God wants to give us is found in the Eucharist. When we see the external appearances of bread and wine, let us internally perceive Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. God's grace can open our hearts to meet Jesus every time we receive Him in the Blessed Sacrament. Here, we take the Word of God, through Whom all the universe was made, into ourselves. It is an opportunity to rest in intimate union with God Himself! There is nothing else more restful for our souls this side of Heaven. As St. Augustine beautifully prayed, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord and our hearts are restless until they rest in you." When we receive Jesus in the Eucharist, let us find our rest there, in communion with God Himself in the depths of our soul.

At Mass, we have the opportunity to rest from the busyness of our lives and truly be renewed by encountering God Himself in His word and in the Eucharist. As a priest, it is my privilege to be an instrument of God in providing you with the rest your souls desire in the Sacraments, above all the Eucharist. So let us focus on how God wants to calm and refresh our

souls in this moment. I pray that we all make it a priority to seek rest with God often throughout our week: in prayer and above all in the Mass.

*+ Heavenly Father, thank you for this moment of rest with Jesus in Mass. Help us to truly open our hearts to the refreshment available to us here. Jesus help us to seek our rest above all in you and not so much in the things that the world offers us. Holy Spirit, open our hearts to recognize what Jesus is trying to do in the depths of our hearts in this time of rest and to cooperate with it. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen. +*