

## Take Time to Nourish Your Body

Last week I spent some time reflecting with you on what it would look like for you and I to take time to raise the bar of our life at the beginning of this 2015. I would invite you to turn to the blue insert in your bulletin, take that out for a moment. You will notice on one side of it there, it's entitled on the top, Take Time To Raise The Bar. I just took some time to reflect actually, in the book of Proverbs over this past week and invite you to take some time to reflect on this with me. This is just one of the ways in which you and I can reflect on the book of Proverbs at the beginning of this year and look at it in relationship to our lives.

As you know, the vision of St. John's is to Embrace God, Love Our Neighbor and Serve the World. So, I kind of broke it down that way. First of all, embracing our trust in the Lord with all your heart and decline not on your own understanding, in all your ways acknowledge him and he will direct your paths. Proverbs 3-6. This is just one of my most favorite verses in the whole of Scripture. It is a great scriptural way for you and I to begin to build that foundation of embracing God in our life more deeply and trusting in him following him. Secondly, love your neighbor. The house of the righteous contains great treasure, but the income of the wicked brings them trouble. You will remember last week, I reflected with you on the reality of how our life can be like a house that the Lord desires to fill with rare and beautiful treasures. Below that Proverbs 14:30 reads, "A heart at peace gives life to the body but envy rots the bones." I love Proverbs. It is just straight to the point, very simple, not complicated. So again, one of the treasures I believe that God desires to give you and me especially in this present day that we live is his gift of peace. You know, in such an incredible treasure that we can have with the peace of the Lord in the midst of all that is going on, and that peace can be a great blessing to neighbors and ourselves as well. Finally, Serve the World: Proverbs 19:17. "He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord and he will reward him for what he has done". Did you realize that when you are kind to the poor you are actually making a loan to the Lord? I thought that was pretty awesome. I never thought of myself as doing that but it's kind of a great position to be in. The Lord says he will reward us for what we have done. Finally, what I will be sharing with you about today: take time to nourish your body. "My son, preserve sound judgment and discernment. Do not let them out of your sight, then you will go on your way in safety and your foot will not stumble. When you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet; Proverbs 3:21 and on. Just a great verse of promise for you and me. Again, very timely subjects given what we are going through today, the issue of fear and the issue of being able to even sleep at night and rest in the midst of that which am in a touch on during my message. I invite you to take this with you. Put it in your Bible, your devotional, alongside your fridge, something you might look at in this coming year as some of the promises that God has for you and me as we follow him.

Have you ever experienced a good night sleep? Sure, all of us have! Yeah! A Lot of smiles, a lot of warm memories of that. It is a great thing. It is a wonderful thing to have a great night sleep. It is a tonic for life. You wake up refreshed and ready to go. I don't know if you knew this or not, but there's actually a chemical that induces sleep for all human beings. It is called Muramyl Dipeptide (MDP). It actually stimulates cells that fight diseases, bacteria and infections. It actually helps people recover from illness. The next time that you hear advice to you if you're sick to make sure that you get some rest. There is a reason for that, it is actually your rest for us is healing.

If we are able to enter into the deepest part of sleep, which is REM sleep, blood flow actually decreases to your brain and it increases to the muscles, allowing the mind and the brain to rest during that time while promoting muscle healing and restoration. It helps you to solve problems creatively because during REM sleep the brain begins to a form where called associative networks. Researchers believe this because neurotransmitters are affected during sleep in your brain. So when you're dreaming or when you wake up with intuitive insights in the morning, that's what's going on. Those are some of the ways in which these solutions are communicated to you. So again, if you thought your dreams were simply the result of eating something late at night that you should have that might be part of the reason, but probably not. It's probably your brain and in all of your body at work coming up with solutions even while you sleep for the waking hours of your life. A good night rest actually prepares us for being awake. It gives us better judgment, results in alertness and being calm. So, if you want to live with vitality, I encourage all of us to sleep well and asleep long and to enjoy that as well. It is very important.

I want to share with you a story about someone who was one of the great prophets of God, a person that all of you know about, and have heard about before by the name of Elijah. Elijah was an incredible servant of God, who for the most part, had an incredible life. But with the story I'm going to share with you right now, is going through a particularly troubling time in his life. What happened was Elijah had been called by God to face down the Prophets of Baal in the nations of Israel and to confront them. He did that. God blessed him for doing that, in the stories in 1 Kings 19, if you ever want to read through it. 1 Kings 19 up through about 21 or 22. So he confronted them. God gave him a great victory. He actually called down fire from heaven upon the offering of the Lord upon the alter and it was all consumed. All of the Prophets of Baal were destroyed. It was an incredible day in Elijah's life. It was an incredible victory in his own personal spiritual journey and an incredible victory for God on behalf of his people Israel. The people of Israel in that moment have been delivered from a great idolatry.

Then there was a woman who heard about this by the name of Jezebel, I'm sure you've heard that name too. Jezebel had actually been the one who had brought the Prophets of Baal into Israel and had encouraged this idol worship. When she heard of what Elijah had done, she sent a message to him and said to him, "May the gods beat deal with me ever so severely if I do not kill you by tomorrow." Not a very nice thing to say to anybody. That's just how she was. That's just how upset she was. When Elijah got this message, he became incredibly afraid. It chilled him to the bone. What happened is, out of his fear, Elijah began to run. He actually ran into the desert because he was afraid for his life. Now one of the questions I ask as I read the story is, why would Elijah do that? He had just defeated all of these prophets. God had just given him this incredible miracle, this deliverance. Why would he run away from this one woman's threat? All I can say to you is for some reason, he was deeply afraid. It affected his spirit. There was a power there that just grabbed a hold of him and caused him to be afraid. It's the only thing that makes sense, and so he ran for his life.

As Elijah is running out into the desert, away from Israel, away from Jezebel so he could preserve his life, when he gets out into the middle of the desert, he's exhausted. He's tired, he is worn out and begins to pray. He begins to pray a very simple prayer. He begins to pray for death. Have you ever been there before in your life, where things have just gotten so rough, so out of kilter and so at the end of your rope that you just prayed for death? That's where Elijah was. He was exhausted and discouraged. He had had enough of life and then he goes to sleep. He is just worn out.

A little bit later in the story, an angel of the Lord comes to him, wakes him up and begins to minister to him. It is interesting to me what the angel does not do. The angel does not have some kind of special staff that he touches Elijah with and all of a sudden Elijah's re-empowered and everything's okay. The angel does not have a prayer with him or something like that, although that would have been an entirely appropriate for an angel to do with somebody at this point, but rather the angel does something that any good Italian would have done. Listen to me for a moment. In this story, what the angel does is serve Elijah a meal. He gives him some hot bread. He gives him some water. There is no salad in here, but you can give him that as well, right? Hot bread and water, and he encourages him to eat. To mangia. He does, and he goes back to sleep.

A little bit later on the story, the angel awakens him again. Like again, like a good Italian, he encouraged him to have a second helping. There's some more hot bread and some more revitalizing water. Elijah eats and drinks that as well, and then he goes back to sleep again. It says that Elijah is so strengthened by God's provision through this angel, that he travels 40 days and nights to the mountain of God. Now one of the important things that is in this story that you and I need realize is that, as this angel was ministering to Elijah, the second time that he comes to him and gives him some more bread and some more water, the angel says something very interesting to Elijah. He says to him, "The journey is too much for you. The journey is too much for you." You know what, the angel was just speaking the truth to Elijah and that's why he needed to eat some more and he needed rest some more, because in his humanity, all that was going on for him right now was just overwhelming him. Beloved, what I want to share with you here today, is that sometimes for you and for me, the journey will be too much for you. If you and I do not have divine intervention of some sort in that moment, you will not finish the journey. There are moments in your journey and in my journey where we are like Elijah where we are just going to need to take a break and be restored, to be refreshed by the mercy of God in whatever way God would have us be restored. That we might even be able to have the grace to finish the journey. As the angel has ministered to him and strengthened him for the journey, and he travels through the same wilderness that the Israelites would travel through for 40 years, he comes in the same mountain where God enters into covenant with Israel on Mount Sinai with the Ten Commandments. He experiences the awesome presence of God afresh. Not in an earthquake. Not in a mighty wind. Not in any mighty kind of way. God whispers to him in that undeniable, still small, sweet loving voice of God, and begins to speak to Elijah and bring healing to his spirit as well.

Are you taking time to nourish your body? Wherever you may be right now, whatever you are going through? Are you taking time to do that? Some of you might be saying, "Father Joe, why are you even talking about this? I feel like I'm listening to my trainer at the gym, or reading this book about physical exercise, or diet, or whatever. What are you doing talking about this? The reason I am talking about this is that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. That's the way the Scripture describes your body and mind. And your body, your physical body is holy to the Lord. How you treat that body is going to have a direct impact upon your spiritual life as well. So I ask you here today are you getting about 6 to 8 hours of sleep a night. If you are, great! But if you are not, one of the questions I want to ask you is why isn't that happening? Maybe there's something physically going on. Maybe you've always struggled with getting a good night sleep. I don't know what it might be, but I would encourage you, if you haven't sought out an answer for that, I would encourage you to do so. Maybe see your doctor. Maybe begin to read up on what a good night sleep looks like and how you might foster that in your life. It was interesting... we read a book on spiritual disciplines about a year ago and in that book, one of the first

things he said talked about was the discipline of rest. I had never heard that before, but his point was that one of the greatest things our culture currently suffers from is exhaustion. You know, whenever you talk to people, it's always about all of us how busy we are. There's so much going on and we even try to jam more into our schedules. Thank God for our smart phones and are our tablets or devices... we can keep adding to the schedule and we won't forget what we're doing on Friday morning at 7:30, right? Because it is all there! Or whether we want to remember it or not as we add, we are busy, busy, busy and we are exhausted. God did not create us to be exhausted. He created us to be restored, refreshed and renewed. If your life and my life is so busy that we are always exhausted, then I believe we're living in sin and we need to begin to cut back, that our lives might be pleasing to the Lord.

Anyways, when I read this book, I usually get about five or six hours of sleep and I thought, pretty decent. Given what I read in that book, I said, you know what; I'm going to try to kick in another hour. Over the past year, I've sometimes done that, I've sometimes not. I have to say, when I do, I just noticed a huge difference. It has really been a blessing to me. I want to encourage you, in that for those especially who think sleep is a waste of time. For those of you who think that when you sleep, you are not getting something done, you're wrong. You're wrong. Actually, the more that you sleep, the more that you will be able to get done during your waking hours as well.

Are you taking time for a healthy diet and exercise? You know, what are you eating? What are you putting into your body? You know, you and I both realize that whatever we eat, whatever we continue to consume is what we become. It is what we drink as well. All of that stuff affects our makeup and what our bodies become. Also, exercise; are you taking time to work out, getting out and walking around? Maybe you don't run the marathon anymore. You don't have to. But a nice walk around the block, lawn or the beach is a great step in the right direction. All of it will lead to health for you.

Finally, in terms of our health, our bodies and our spirit, what about the negative feelings that are part of your life? I just want to focus in on one of them today and that is the feeling of fear. Is fear or anxiety affecting your ability to rest and be restored in your being? Who or what are you afraid of exactly and why are you afraid of them? Why are you running? Why aren't you sleeping at night? Why are they keeping you up at night? Or why is that situation so absorbing you that you can't get a good night's rest? Why is it when things overall are going well for you, you have to think about something to be anxious about? This is because that's part of who you are, right? This is part of who we are. If we find ourselves constantly coming up with things to worry about, that is something that you and I need to be healed of. We need to be healed of that because again God did not create us to be beings that are full of anxiety and fear. He created us to be full of his peace. That's why when Jesus walked into the upper room where the disciples were he didn't say, "My anxiety be with you. I want you to be fearful. Fear me. Fear the world. Fear tomorrow. You thought you were anxious; let me give you something else to worry about." You see, many of us serve that kind of God. No, he said, "My peace be with you."

I guess my question for you and me today is, do you really want that peace? As you and I commune with the Lord like Elijah did, even at the bottom of the worst times in our life, I invite us to listen to his whispering words. Listen to what he says to us and what he speaks to us. As you read this story in 1 Kings, what God says to Elijah when he is finally renewed and is eaten and is rested and he hears the presence of God in his whisper, what God says to Elijah is, "Elijah, what are you doing here? What are you doing here?" Translation: "Elijah, you have no business being here." It is important for you and me to listen to the whisper of God, to listen to his voice and to receive from him what he wants to give us.

Take time to nourish your body during this year. Your body is a beautiful temple of the Holy Spirit. It is a gift from God to you. In whatever shape it may be in right now, you are still breathing, you are still alive and God has a purpose for you. God has an intention for you in the fullness of his love and his grace and his healing presence.

Fr. Joe Maiocco

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