

Take Time to Feed Your Soul

There was a time where my family and I had a chance to live in Hawaii. It was a really, really tough experience during that time. I actually was serving as a chaplain in the Navy at Pearl Harbor. We had a great time. During my time there, Hawaii is noted actually for having all kinds of different races to run in. They have Iron Man's, 10 man's and Great Aloha runs and all kinds of things. However, I had some other races that were actually my favorites. Some of them I ran in, some of them I didn't. One of the races that was my favorite was the chocolate and champagne race. Unfortunately, I never had a chance to run in this race. I still can't remember why I never made it, but it would've made for some interesting burps along the way, I know. There was another race that I did run and it was called, The Symphony Race. As you ran along this race in the beautiful environs of Hawaii, there would be different parts of the Honolulu Symphony playing. So this wasn't about your time; this wasn't about running your best race, this was about making sure you made a stop at your favorite part of the Symphony and just hearing them play and then continuing with the race. It was just a wonderful, wonderful thing that Hawaii would have so many different kinds of races that would celebrate so many different kinds of things. I thought it was wonderful.

I think back on those moments with you now, those moments remind me in the midst of a race called life that it is important for you and I to take time for chocolates, champagne and for symphonies as well. That is important for you and I to take time in the midst of all that our life entails to celebrate those little moments and to enjoy them and that the gusto in the gift that life can be for us. What I want to reflect with you on this morning is that I believe the Lord invites us to do just that. To take time to feed our soul. You know, so often in our culture, especially with the advent of technology and how quickly things are developing and transpiring and at such a hurry pace, it is so busy that a lot of times people think that if you take a break that you're wasting time. I want to submit to you here today that one of the most important things that you and I can do in our lives and especially in relationship to our soul is to take time to feed our soul, to nourish our soul and to rest and be with the Lord.

One of the great Psalms in Scripture that so many people know is a song that you'll know, I know, Psalm 23. It's a Psalm of great comfort. It's a Pastoral Psalm. It was a Psalms that was actually written by David and what a great person to write it because as you know he grew up as a shepherd on the hills of Israel tending sheep. This particular Psalm was obviously written out of that experience for him, but it was also written out of his own experience of the Lord's own shepherding of his life as he lived it out. You'll remember the first few verses of that particular Psalm, "The Lord is my shepherd I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures and he leads me beside still waters. And he restores my soul."

I'm just going to spend my time on those first few verses of Psalm 23. First of all, it says in the very beginning, that for David, the Lord was his shepherd. So I want to ask all of us a very important question here today and that is, is the Lord your Shepherd? You know as a shepherd tends the sheep, one of the important things that a shepherd does is he provides for them. That's what Psalm 23 talks about. It talks about providing a food for the sheep in green pastures. It talks about providing them with good water. It also talks about the reality that this shepherd is good. It is not bad. He's not wicked. He's not evil. He is not cruel. But he's a good shepherd. He takes care of his sheep.

One of the other things that a good shepherd does is he protects them from evil. He guides them along the right path that they're supposed to take. The only thing is that there are always some sheep within a flock that want to do it their way. Yes it's true. There is an 'Oh No' from the choir, rhetorical, I know, but it's true. That the same is true today, isn't it? There are some sheep within the Lord's flock that want to do it their own way and all of us have been one of those sheep at one time or another. So one of the things for you and I that we need to answer from the very beginning is, is the Lord really are shepherd? Are we really allowing him to guide and lead our steps? When we get off the trail and we know when we do that, are we willing to come back on it and follow him afresh as our Shepherd? I think that's one of the most important things to understand about ourselves. The other thing that this particular Psalm speaks about is that the Lord's sheep will want for nothing. That if you and I follow him as the good Shepherd of our souls, we will have everything that we need in terms of food, water, nourishment and restoration. Everything that we'll need. He will lead us to green pastures. Green pastures are grassy homesteads that form an oasis in the midst of a barren land. It talks about those green pastures that sheep would eat. When I read that phrase about green pastures, I think of God's word...The Scriptures. I would encourage you if you're not in God's word daily already to begin to do that. A great place to start is the Gospel of John. It's one of the easier Gospels in the whole Bible and I would start with a chapter a day. When you begin to read the Bible, I would encourage us to pray; ask God to guide lead you in the understanding of the Scripture and then do so. Somebody was sharing with me last night how they do Our Daily Bread. And we have another devotional in the back, if you use a devotional like Jesus Calling. That's great as well. But the main thing I want to encourage you to do is to eat. Eat for your soul every day. Read God's word. Be in to some spiritual reading, especially in the Bible. Join a Bible study so that you can feed your soul and so that God can speak to you. This is more than a novel. It is more than a fairytale. It is more than a collection of very old stories. It is, we believe, God's word that is alive, that as you and I read it, consider it, meditate upon it, God feeds our soul in supernatural and incredible ways. He leads us beside green pastures and still waters. When I read that phrase, "still waters" I think of the presence of the Holy Spirit. Again another thing that's important for you and I to do and we been seeking to do over these past few years, is to welcome the presence of the Holy Spirit into our lives daily, that our lives might be watered. That we might drink deeply of the water in the nourishment in the presence and the power of God's Spirit that he desires to give us. Some of you are saying to yourself right now, "Father Joe, I don't know what you're talking about. I've never had this experience in my life before. I come to church every Sunday and the rest of the week, I just kind of do my own thing. What is it that you are talking about?" What I'm talking about is about you and I actually being the Lord's sheep. I'm talking about you and me actually living out a spiritual journey that is real. I'm talking about you and I actually having a relationship with Jesus that is worthy of the term 'relationship' that is real and exists. As you and I feed on God's word, as you and I are nourished by the water of the Holy Spirit in our lives, begin to experience the reality of that relationship, and begin to really have a spiritual journey, we will be nourished.

Have you ever sat down at a meal and you've had the meal but afterwards you're still hungry? You've had that experience before where you've sat down, you've eaten, and it just hasn't been enough. It just didn't really hit you. It just didn't really nourish you. What's important for you and I, especially in our soul, is that we would be nourished. That we would be sustained. That we would eat and drink in such a way that our spirits would be enlivened, encouraged and blessed so much so that we would be deeply restored to the very depth of our being. As you and I really spend time in God's word and spend time in the presence of the Holy Spirit and in fellowship with one another, what you and I should be

experiencing is nourishment. We should be experiencing at the end of the service, 'you know what, I went to church today. I was in church today. I worshiped the Lord. I heard his word. I sang praises to him. I prayed from the depth of my heart. My presence, my being was nourished in the presence of the Lord. That's what you and I are looking for. That's what you and I really want. That's what God wants for us. He wants our souls to be restored. To be enlivened. To be strengthened and to grow and deepen in every way.

If you've ever been out on a real hot day working or walking, one of the great things to do on a day like that is to get a cold glass of water or cold drink of something to quench your thirst. It's a wonderful thing. Or maybe you've experienced a spiritual renewal of really great worship. Or maybe had the experience of healing. How about last week? And the Sunday that we had together of healing prayer, of anointing you with oil, of healing prayer teams praying for you, of the worship that we experience. That was a moment where we profoundly experienced the restoring presence of Almighty God. You knew it and you felt it, and so did I. Or those moments where you're really tired at the end of the day and you have a really deep and refreshing rest. You and I need to be restored. We need to be restored at the very depth of our being because when we are, we are energized. We are passionate. We are empowered and we are renewed to live life again and anew.

Let me ask you a question. How many of you in your life, say this coming week, set aside just one day to eat to nourish your body physically? You would just eat, let's just say one meal and you have one glass of water or whatever, and that would be it. How many of you are going to do that this week? Yeah nobody's gonna do that this week! You guys are going to eat and drink each and every day this week and I say that's good. You need to mangia, you need to drink because we are human beings. We are physical beings and we need to nourish our physical bodies. God has created us to be that way so that we can live. I'm grateful that everyone of you, come here and you worship on the weekend... you come before the Lord. But let me say to you if that is all of your spiritual experience for the whole week, spiritually it is like eating only one meal a week. So that is why I keep talking about being in the Scripture each day. That is why I keep talking about being in prayer each and every day of your life. That is why I keep encouraging all of us to be open to the presence of the Holy Spirit continually filling us and being open to fellowship during the week with one another, Bible study, fellowship groups and in prayer because we need more than one meal a week spiritually. I see some lights beginning to go on. This is good. This is good.

I want to encourage you; I want to encourage you to feed your soul. Take time to feed your soul and your spirit. Take time to let the Lord lead you into the green pastures of his word. Take time to be open to be with the Lord and God's word. Take time to maybe go to a Bible study that you never been to before, we have a lot of them in this church. Take time to be in fellowship through Foyers. Take time to go and serve at St. Matthew's House or in other parts, Habitat, other things we do in terms of outreach in this community, and be open to feeding your soul each and every day of your life. And as you do, you will be nourished. You'll be strengthened to the very depth of your being. You will be healed. God will reveal to you what his next steps are for you, and God will give you the strength and the power to do it. You will no longer be living out of a burned out center.

You know today so many people are so busy. They're so busy going from here to there, and doing this and that, and this appointment, in that meeting, and doing this thing, and that. They are so busy rushing around that, that's what they're doing. But there's no sense of balance in their life. There's no sense of

energy in their life. There's no sense of a center in their life. There's no sense of an abundance in their life. The center of their life is a barren desert because it is. The only way that you and I can move toward a place of abundance and refreshment and verdant pastures and streams of living water is if each and every day, you and I spend time with the Good Shepherd. As the Good Shepherd leads you and me to those places, places of abundance. Places of fullness. Places of grace so that when you reach out to someone, when you wake up in the morning, when you come to love somebody and care for them, when you come into a situation where somebody needs your help you are giving to them out of your abundance. The abundance that God has given you because your soul is fed, nourished and ready to give.

In closing, according to New Man magazine, writer and theologian Henry Nowan once broke away from his busy schedule to live six months in a monastery. He shares, "I realized, I was caught in a web of strange paradoxes. While complaining about too many demands, I felt uneasy when none were made. While speaking about the burden of letter writing, an empty mailbox made me sad. While speaking nostalgically about an empty desk, I feared the day that would come true. In short, while desiring to be alone, I was frightened to be left alone. The more I became aware of these paradoxes, the more I started to see how much I needed to step back and wonder, is there a quiet stream underneath the fluctuating affirmations and rejections of my little world."

Henry during that time, our brother, he found the quiet stream. He found the Good Shepherd. He found that in the midst of all of these different things that were going on in his life, as beautiful and as nice as they were, there was something far deeper and more profound and more important for him. That was his relationship with the Lord. That was his sole being nourished and sustained in green pastures and its still waters. It was a life that was again becoming and lived out of abundance and vibrancy rather than an emptiness that was never being felt. Beloved of God, the Good Shepherd has called you to something truly great. Your greatness and my greatness will always and only be built on our relationship to him as our Shepherd to be one of his sheep. To be one of his sheep who, this morning, has spent some time in the green pastures, who has enjoyed drinking of those still cool waters. Who has been sustained by the presence of the Holy Spirit and who begins to meet their day with a soul that is restored. Make a decision today, wherever you might be, to begin to be that kind of sheep.

Fr. Joe Maiocco

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