

There is a difference between a disciple and an apostle. A disciple is one who learns, an apostle is one who is sent. Jesus had hundreds of disciples. Out of that number He chose twelve apostles. Last week we listened as Jesus sent His apostles out into the world to preach the Word of God. After learning at the master's feet as disciples, they became His ambassadors, sent out into the world to announce His message and testify to the Truth. Today we hear of the return of the missionaries from their first mission. They came back to report on their progress.

We know from the writings of the other evangelists that this was a time of rejoicing and high energy. Imagine what they must have experienced. The Lord gave them authority to cast out demons and the ability to heal the sick. The apostles had experienced the power of God working through them, moving people's hearts through their words and deeds. They were excited by the adventure and no doubt all had stories they wanted to share with each other.

How does Jesus respond to his returning missionaries? Certainly He was pleased to be reunited with His friends but He also recognized the importance of balancing all that activity with rest. Jesus took His apostles and withdrew to a quiet place, where they could share a meal and listen to each other's stories. He wanted them to have a moment's rest and reflection after a period of such intense activity. He wanted to reconnect them with the quiet intimacy of their small community.

There is a clear message but it is so difficult to put into practice. Christians who are energetically engaged in evangelizing the world around them need to balance their activity with rest and contemplation. We too need time, a time of quiet intimacy, in personal conversation with the Lord.

This is not always easy and not always possible. As Jesus saw, people that need Him would simply follow Him wherever He went.

How many times in our busy lives have we planned for some quiet time, to rest from our activity only to be called to help someone at the last minute? And it is usually not someone you can easily dismiss or put off. It is almost always an urgent need that stirs up your compassion to attend to immediately. When we have given our lives to Christ, our lives and our time is no longer our own.

But even so we must still find time for quiet conversations with God or we run the risk of being burned out by the constant giving of ourselves to others. It can be emotionally and physically draining. Our spiritual state and our emotional state are intertwined; one affects the other. If we are emotionally drained from tending to others, it will affect us spiritually.

From time to time we need to recharge our batteries. Stress, discouragement and demands on our limited time and resources can wear us out if we do not daily reinforce our faith in Christ. Only our friendship with Christ can supply us with the strength

and wisdom we need to be truly successful, successful not only in the roles we play but in who we are beneath those roles.

Without prayer, study, and time alone with God, our well will soon run dry and we will have nothing left to offer to others. Or worse yet, we are not at our best and run the risk of misleading people in the faith. We may grow tired and inattentive and teach error. The clergy and religious know this. They know the importance of prayer to strengthen their work. This is why we are encouraged to begin any activity, with a prayer. Priests and deacons are obliged to begin and end their day in prayer.

In a sense we are all called to be shepherds of God's people. And we should all take seriously the admonition from today's first reading, "Woe to the shepherds who mislead and scatter the flock of my pasture. I will take care to punish your evil deeds."

But in addition to prayer, there is effort, there is action. Without action, without giving freely to others what we have received from God, then even our spiritual lives become stagnant. A healthy relationship with God expresses itself in the activities we undertake.

Our society tends to stress the importance of action over prayer but the two really are meant to go together in every aspect of our life.

In 1571, after nearly a thousand years of conflict with Christianity, the Muslim forces of the Ottoman Empire were on the verge of controlling the entire Mediterranean Sea. This would have been a disaster and signaled all but the end of Christian Europe. Under the guidance of Pope Pius V, a league of Christian kingdoms, under the command of John of Austria, was formed to meet the Turkish navy. After only five hours of battle the outnumbered Christian forces won a decisive victory and stalled the advance of Islam into the West.

This tremendous effort on the part of a united Christian Europe was preceded by a simple, but no less important, act of prayer. Before the battle John of Austria led his ship in praying the rosary, and as their prayers carried over the water, ship after ship took up the call until the entire fleet of over 200 ships prayed together.

John of Austria is regarded as one of the last models of a Christian knight. A true soldier in the service of Christ is a symbol of courage, fortitude, mercy and justice. But above all he remembers that Christ is the true source of all strength, justice, and hope.

We could do far worse than to emulate the ideal of the Christian knight. We serve God just as he did. Our Lord is Jesus Christ and to fulfill our mission to evangelize the world we need both prayer and action.

In the medieval world, before a man received knighthood, he spent the entire night in prayer, on his knees, in full armor, before the crucifix,

St. Benedict of Nursia, the father of western monasticism, had a motto that perfectly sums up this lesson, “Ora et Labora.” Ora is Latin for pray and labora is Latin for work. Prayer and work, are the two sides of the coin of our Christian life.

But even though both are equally important for our spiritual maturity, in today’s world one of them is harder than the other. Today’s society is so focused on getting things done, on task lists and action points and bottom lines, that many people have actually lost sight of the things that are really worth doing and why. Every time we come up with a “labor-saving” device, we just fill up that saved time with more labor. The noisy, fast and superficial pace of our digital world makes prayer harder and harder, because prayer requires internal discipline and depth. For John of Austria, starting any great endeavor without prayer was unthinkable.

Everything we do has both a material and a spiritual aspect.

We are now in Ordinary Time, that period between Easter and Advent. This is the perfect time to improve our prayer life. And God will help us, if we give Him the chance.

One-way to do this is to make a commitment to a regular prayer life. We need to pray daily, not just when the mood strikes us. We need to have a daily quiet time when we can speak to Christ, pray for our loved ones, reflect on the scriptures, or read some good solid spiritual book. That means setting aside some time out of each day. It doesn't have to be a lot of time, 10 minutes in the morning and 10 minutes in the evening is a good start. But it has to be consistent, and that means self-discipline. I have heard of one priest who goes out into the cemetery to pray his Rosary, because he knows that if he doesn't, the phone calls and demands upon his time will simply crowd it out.

God wants us to stay close to Him through prayer, so that with Him we will be able to DO great things for His Kingdom. I will leave you with the words of Pope Benedict XVI: "One who prays is not afraid; one who prays is never alone; one who prays is saved!"