

Rest in God, that we might offer others rest ...

Readings: [IS 66:10-14C](#); [PS 66:1-3, 4-5, 6-7, 16, 20](#); [GAL 6:14-18](#); [LK 10:1-12, 17-20](#)

As we prepare to unpack our readings for the week, call to mind the last time you experienced something that wore you out to your very core: body, mind and soul. Perhaps it was the experience of a life-threatening illness, or an enduring athletic endeavor like a marathon or triathlon. Perhaps it was the experience of pregnancy and childbirth, or the experience of moving, saying goodbye to a place that was home for a long, long time. Perhaps it is simply the daily grind of your day-to-day life. In these times of bone-tiredness, to whom or to what do you turn for comfort for the rest you so badly need? The warmth of a plush soft blanket as you collapse onto the couch or bed, the embrace of a partner or parent, the comforting words of a well-worn copy of your favorite book—these are just a few things to which you might turn amid a trying and tiring time.

It is this type of comfort being offered to the people of Israel in our first reading. Indeed, though they have long suffered, finally, God offers to, “spread prosperity over Jerusalem like a river,” carrying them in her arms and holding them lovingly in her lap. God is portrayed as a nurturing and comforting mother, who is creating for the people of Israel a new home which is plentiful and where all can, “flourish like grass.” While the image of God as a parent is a common analogy, the image of God as mother might not be as familiar. Nevertheless, given the role of the mother in childbirth, it is an extremely fitting one for the new creation being described. There is no pregnancy, childbirth or infancy without the active participation of a mother. Similarly, the creation of the prosperity described is impossible without the generosity and commitment of God. Thus, we are invited to take advantage of the rest, of the comfort and nurturing we are offered the way a child does not hesitate to reach out for their mother in the midst of painful and difficult experiences.

Certainly, the nurturing of God, especially in times of difficulty, is a valuable and important reminder. However, it is the pairing of this first reading with the themes of the New Testament readings that is most interesting. That is, this elaborate description of the ways in which God cares, comforts and nurses us as God’s own child is juxtaposed with a unique invitation to actively participate in God’s kingdom. While this theme can be inferred from Paul’s letter when he emphasizes that all that matters is a new creation, it is much more clearly outlined in the gospel reading.

What we hear in the gospel is significant on many levels, nevertheless, some context is significant for how we appropriate what we hear to our own lived experiences. Take note

that this is technically ‘Round Two’ of Jesus sending followers on mission. The Twelve have been sent previously, however, these additional 72 receive instruction that is nearly the same as their predecessors: leave everything behind, and, allow yourself to be welcomed into the homes and communities of those who are different. That these 72 receive similar instruction is significant, as it reminds us that we are all called to spread the Good News. Regardless of how much individual power we feel we have, or, to use a colloquial metaphor, regardless of whether we are first string, or second string, at the end of the day, *we are all called* to build the Kingdom through the spreading of the Gospel message. Not only this, Jesus’s instruction makes it clear that the building of the Kingdom has nothing to do with yielding power over people, but rather, has everything to do with the power of community.

The fact that they are to go out in pairs indicates just how important a role community plays in the kingdom of God. Certainly, they could have covered more ground travelling independently, but two people represent community far better than one individually. How they are instructed to behave indicates how important community is to the Gospel message, too. Jesus explains that he is sending them “like lambs”—that is, a sacrificial animal generally known for its gentleness. When they enter a potential host’s home they are to extend first thing a welcome of peace. It does not matter who they are, what their history is, or where they are from: we are to extend our peace to others like lambs. In return, they are to accept the hospitality they receive and share generously with one another. In other words, not only should they embark on their journey in a spirit of peace and gentleness, they must also embark in a spirit of radical trust in the hospitality of the other and, therefore, the hospitality of God. They are not to bring anything with them, but instead, are to rely on what is offered to them.

Reliance such as this indicates a tremendous amount of trust—both that God will provide and that their hosts will treat them well. The disciples are to remain in the homes where they are received and share in the life that they have entered—eating what is set before them and generally participating in the life of the household. After these other criteria have been met, *then* the disciples are instructed to cure those who are ill—use their power—and to explain it by declaring, “The Kingdom of God is at hand for you.” Only once their relationship with their host has been established are they to demonstrate what the Kingdom of God might look like. Rather than announcing their arrival and purpose from the outset, they are to remain humble, meek and dependent on their community. In short, in a spirit of accompaniment, the 72 offer us an example of how to propose a new way of living without imposing that way of living as a mandate. With the gentleness of a lamb and the trust of a child, the disciples let their lives speak to the glory of God and the Good News of the Gospel.

Without a doubt, to let your life speak in this way is oftentimes trying. It requires patience, time, and an attention to relationship building that is not always highly valued—especially in our fast-paced, modern day world. At its best, the Catholic health ministry works hard day in and day out to make the relational Kingdom of God described in the gospel a reality. Indeed, our mission is centered on a whole-person approach to care that values the patient-provider relationship at least as much as the medical procedures administered. Yet, we know also that provider burnout, compassion fatigue and clinical depression have been a rapidly growing concern over the last decade. According to research conducted in [2014](#), more than half of U.S. physicians are currently experiencing professional burnout. With this in mind, I can't help but think back to the invitation of the first reading to rest and take comfort in the embrace of God, that we might be nurtured in order to nurture others.

Jesus knew well the gravity of what He was asking of the 72 in the gospel we hear today. Therefore, he reminds them upon their return that their “names are written in heaven,” in the same way that Jerusalem is reminded in the first reading that, “The Lord’s power shall be known to his servants.” Similarly, we go out into the world to invite others into the building of the kingdom of God through the building of relationships, and, in the midst of what can be trying, difficult, exhausting work, we know also that God invites us to rest, play and take comfort in God’s goodness the way a child rests peacefully in the arms of their mother or father.