

March 23

## Continually Growing Stronger

***“And they continually devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, and the fellowship, and the breaking of bread, and the prayers...”*** (Acts 2:42)

I “allegedly” play trumpet. That’s what I tell people. Because, honestly, I don’t “play trumpet” very often, with the result that I don’t play trumpet as well as I could. All musical instruments require exercise (practice) but especially brass which involve the embouchure muscles and the mouth working with the cardiovascular system as a “wind instrument.” As we know, muscles are different for different types of sports. As I am told, this is similar to the different meat in our Thanksgiving turkey: red meat – oxygenated muscles that are used all the time; white meat – muscles that are not used regularly, and therefore are not as well oxygenated.

In those rare stretches where I happen to be playing often, the muscles in my embouchure improve, my range and my stamina improve, and I start to think of myself as a real trumpet player.

And it is amazing to me how one missed practice makes such a difference in strength.

I think the analogy works well when it comes to the above verse from Acts. I literally have not been on a bicycle for two years. May be more. But I *know* how to ride a bike. When I don’t practice my trumpet for months (yes, sometimes it has been *months*), I can still “play” the trumpet. A few notes, a few bars, maybe a short song. I might even fool some people if they listen to me for a few minutes.... (It would have to be “just a few” to fool anyone.)

Many baptized Christians only occasionally “practice” their faith. In most cases, I suspect they are still genuine Christians! They still believe Christ died for them, took all of their sins upon Himself, and gave them His goodness – *and* the faith that they have that believes all of that!

But, these infrequently “practicing” Christians are weak in that faith, if they indeed even still have it. Why not be strong?

When St. Luke described the early church and their regular lifestyle, he was describing both the practice and the result. It seems devoted people got up very early each morning and participated in a brief worship service with Communion. One of my Greek lexicons describes the original participle behind the two-word English phrase ***“continually devoted”*** this way: *proskarteréō* means “to continue to do something with intense effort, with the possible implication of despite difficulty – ‘to devote oneself to, to keep on, to persist in’” (Ironically, the author of that definition is named “Strong!”)

It took significant fortitude for the saints in the first century to gather together early in the morning for Word, worship, and the Eucharist. They wanted to do this to be strong, and in a culture where very few Christians were present, they needed to do it to sustain their faith. So the “strength” came from not only their desire to devote themselves but also from the worship and communion itself! God wants us to practice our faith, to be strong.

Why be weak?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus Christ, let us with a strong conviction, worship You, and receive Your strength in return. By Your Word, worship, and sacraments cultivate in us a desire to be strong. In Jesus’ Name we pray. Amen.