

March 4

## The Mysterious Life

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

Back in 1899, Theodore Roosevelt gave a speech in Chicago extolling what he called “the strenuous life.” The strenuous life, he said, was the “life of toil and effort, of labor and strife; to preach that highest form of success which comes, not to the man who desires mere easy peace, but to the man who does not shrink from danger, from hardship or from bitter toil, and who out of these wins the splendid ultimate triumph.” For personal, and even national, success, Roosevelt said, individuals must embrace this strenuous life, not taking the easy way, but eschewing all sloth and laziness for a life of purposeful difficulty. To truly thrive, Roosevelt believed that one had to take life by the horns, forge one’s own path, and follow the strenuous ethos.

Life in the church is different. It is a *strenuous* life, because we continually fight against sin on a daily basis. But more than that, it is a life marked by the mysteries of the faith as they are expressed in Word and Sacrament. To successfully fight against sin and temptation, we need to constantly be engaging with the mysteries of the faith.

How do we do this? Well, we do what the Christians in the early church did, as described in Acts 2:42, and what the Church has always done: We observe the Sabbath Day and keep it holy. We go to church to hear the Word of God spoken to us in the readings and preached to us from the pulpit (that’s right—your pastor’s sermon is *God speaking to you!*). And we confess our sins and hear God’s absolution—that’s God’s life-giving word that takes away our sins, spoken to us. And we receive forgiveness and life and strength in the Lord’s Supper, that wonderful “medicine of immortality” that Christ gives to us. These things are the means of grace, through which the mystery of the Gospel frees us from our sins and helps us live and grow as Christians. We need these means of grace, we need these mysteries, to aid us in the struggle, to keep us engaged strenuously in our fight against sin. But they are not derived from our own willpower or our own strength. Their strength is God’s strength, and he imparts it to us.

Therefore, if we want to fight the good fight, we “[devote ourselves] to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” We need these things, and we need each other to encourage us to receive them. Luther says in his *Large Catechism* concerning the Lord’s Supper, “If you could see how many knives, darts and arrows are every moment aimed at you, you would be glad to come to the sacrament as often as possible” (LC 5.81-82).<sup>1</sup> So let it be with every means of grace God grants to us, so that we can indeed live a mysterious life.

**Prayer:** *Dear God – Father, Son, and Holy Ghost: Grant that we may ever seek those things that you grant us through Your Church, that we may always seek the means by which You richly grant us grace. Help us to live as Your Church always has lived, gathered around Your Word and Sacraments. Strengthen us to fight the good fight of faith daily, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.*

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Eyster Jacobs’ edition, 1916.