**Novena to St. Jude**

**Day 1**

**Waiting in Hope**

**Isaiah 40: 28- 31**

This evening’s reading is from the book of the prophet Isaiah:

*Do you not know, or have you not heard? The LORD is the eternal God, creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint nor grow weary, and his knowledge is beyond scrutiny.*

*He gives strength to the fainting; for the weak he makes vigor abound. Though young men faint and grow weary, and youths stagger and fall, they that hope in the LORD will renew their strength, they will soar as with eagles' wings; They will run and not grow weary, walk and not grow faint.*

*The Word of the Lord.*

Throughout the nine days of this Novena, I will be reflecting broadly with you on the theme of hope. That theme seems particularly appropriate for a novena to St. Jude, the patron saint of impossible or hopeless causes. Of course, we know that with God all things are possible, and there is no such thing as a hopeless cause. Yes, it can be easy to forget that as we look about at our world today. We see and experience so much that cries out to God and to us for comfort and for hope.

The passage we just listened to is one of comfort. Like all scripture, it was written for a particular people at a particular time in history, but its message is universal. It speaks of God and the human condition and reaches across the ages. The people for whom this passage was originally written had been through a great deal. They were feeling deeply discouraged, as though God had either abandoned them, or was simply exhausted and had no strength left to help them. In this passage Isaiah is providing a response to those who have been through so much that they have come to doubt God's power and God's providential care for them. He asks them rhetorical questions, "Do you not know? Have you not heard? God doesn't faint or grow tired." Of course, the Jewish people do know this, and they have heard this throughout their lives. Isaiah is not giving them new information here; he is simply chiding them for losing hope, for doubting God’s care for them.

 Isaiah goes on to reassure them that not only does God not grow tired, but those who wait for the Lord, who trust in the Lord, will renew their own strength. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint. Obviously, this passage doesn’t refer to physical strength. We know that there are times when the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. This passage is referring to inner strength. The ability, in the face of darkness, to maintain hope and to project hope, to keep working toward a vision of a better world, to trust, sometimes beyond reason, all will be well.

 This stance toward life requires not physical strength, but inner strength. And who are the ones who shall renew that inner strength? Isaiah tells us it is those who wait for the Lord. This is not a resigned, passive waiting, but an active, expectant waiting. This type of waiting is filled with faith, confident longing, almost as if the one waiting knows a joyful secret. Those who wait in hope for the Lord have a confidence and trust in God that enables them to mount up with wings like eagles, to run and not grow weary. They know, deep within themselves, that, in the words of Saint Julian of Norwich, “All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.”

This passage and Isaiah’s questions, “Do you not know? Have you not heard?” challenge us to examine our own attitudes. We do know and have heard that God does not faint or grow weary. But I confess to having sometimes felt deeply discouraged over past months. The ordinary challenges of each day are generally enough for us, but we have had added challenges of a seeming never-ending pandemic, hurricanes, fires, droughts, mass shootings, and a violent end to a long war. We see innocents around the world viciously attacked because they are the wrong religion, or the wrong skin color, or the wrong immigration status, or simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. It can be easy to feel deeply discouraged and to wonder whether God has grown as tired as we sometimes feel.

 But Isaiah’s passage reminds us of what we already know. God is a God of hope and of light, and we who wait in hope are called to reflect that light to a world that can sometimes seem very dark. The spiritual writer Richard Rohr quotes South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who once said to him, "Remember, Richard, we are only the light bulbs, and our job is just to remain screwed in." Our job as Christians is to shine. Our power, our ability to run and not grow weary, come from our deep-down confidence that, as Isaiah tells us, “God is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth, and God does not faint or grow weary.” The stronger the darkness seems to grow, the more hopeless the situation appears, the more brightly we are called to shine. We Christians do not have the luxury of sitting in the darkness wishing for better times. When we reflect the light, the joyful confidence in God that is sometimes beyond all reason, we can, like St. Jude, become patrons of hopeless causes.

Do you not know? Have you not heard? Christ, the light of the world, is present with us. In that knowledge, our strength is renewed. We mount up with wings like eagles. We are able to run and not grow weary, to walk and not faint, to hope beyond reason, and to shine forth in faith and in action.