



Welcome to our Eucharistic Celebration

The Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

February 4, 2018

St. Mary of the Assumption Parish

Today's Themes in Scripture

Today's First Reading is a brief excerpt from the Book of Job. The central character, Job, is a faithful, righteous man with many blessings in life. When God permits Satan to test his faith, Job loses everything: wealth and possessions, family, and good health. In this passage, he laments that his life has been reduced to misery and drudgery, over which he has no control. Yet, as his story continues, the innocent Job will not curse God for his hopeless situation as his friends advise. He does not believe suffering is a punishment from God. Job believes that blessings and suffering are part of the mysteries of God: they cannot be understood by thinking that some people deserve them while others do not.

The Gospel for today concludes Mark's attempt to describe a "typical" day in the life of Jesus' ministry. In last week's Gospel, Jesus preached in the synagogue where his authoritative teaching and casting out of demons drew great attention. In this week's gospel, Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law of a fever but there is no rest for Jesus at Peter's home. The sick and suffering find their way there in great numbers, seeking his healing. The demands for Jesus' attention are so great that he must sneak away to pray. Yet, Jesus seems unwilling to stay in any one location; he desires to preach and heal elsewhere. His mission is to bring the good news of salvation to all of Galilee.

Human misery and suffering are on display in both readings, in the lament of Job and in the desperate seeking of those pressing Jesus for a cure. Mark's description of Jesus' day reveals much about who Jesus is. He is the God who comes among his people to lift them up from their suffering. Through his teachings and by his power to heal, Jesus- in the words of today's Psalm- is willing and able to heal the brokenhearted and bind their wounds. He will not stay in any one place, where he could make a name for himself as preacher and miracle worker. Instead he moves on, so that he can bring his message of salvation to all.

There are two people in today's readings who, having had an encounter with Jesus, displayed a very similar response. When Peter's mother-in-law was cured of her fever, she immediately began to serve Jesus and her household. Similarly, when Paul encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus, he responded by becoming an apostle, working tirelessly to bring the Gospel to others. These examples suggest that a life-changing encounter with Jesus can produce a desire to serve others as Jesus did. Whether that service is quietly focused on one's community or is focused outward on the scale of Paul's ministry, there are many opportunities for those touched by Jesus to share his good news and lift others from their suffering.

Sunday Readings and Backgrounds

Reading I: Job 7:1-4, 6-7

My life is like the wind.

- In the Book of Job, God allows Satan to inflict all kinds of suffering on Job.
- Through it all, Job remains faithful to God.
- The story of Job points out that the ways of God are beyond human understanding.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 147: 1-2, 3-4, 5-6

Praise the Lord who heals the brokenhearted.

Reading II: 1 Corinthians 9:16-19, 22-23

I am all things for all people, for the sake of the Gospel.

- The Corinthian community wants to reward Paul for his ministry among them.
- Paul stresses that God's love is freely given.
- In today's passage, Paul preaches to the community about God's generosity.

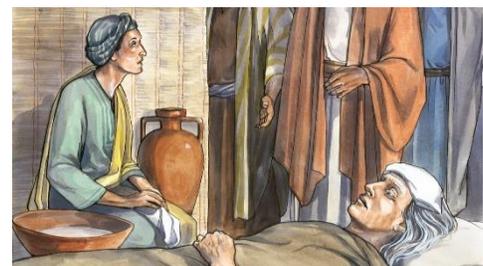
Gospel: Mark 1:29-39

He went to a lonely place to pray.

- The stories of Jesus' miracles are a sign that the power of Satan is broken and the kingdom of God has arrived.
- Jesus is the one who brings the kingdom of God to earth.

In today's Gospel the miracles are signs of the ultimate healing that Jesus will bring to the world.

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**Alpha begins February 20.
Please pray for everyone coming
to Alpha and for our parish.**

Faith Enough to Seek More

Today, St. Millie, one of the seldom noticed model disciples in Mark's Gospel, is going to show us what happens when one is touched by Jesus. Mark didn't actually tell us her name, he only identified her as the mother of Peter's wife. But she's important enough to deserve a name and calling her "Millie" is easier than continually referring to her as Peter's mother-in-law.

Jesus apparently didn't know Millie until he went home with Peter and friends, presumably to get something to eat and discuss the whirlwind day they had just spent going from shore to synagogue. They no sooner get in the house than they inform Jesus that the chief cook, Millie, is laid low with a fever. Jesus wastes not a moment, but goes right to her bedside and takes her by the hand. Fully aware that he's using loaded language, Mark tells us that Jesus raised her up and the fever left her.

We might read this as a testimony that Millie was no weakling or hypochondriac but a hospitable, willing Jewish mother, ever ready to set the table. Someone else might say that it's a tale reinforcing women's servitude. Those who say the latter might be close to deciphering Mark's message, even if their interpretation is inadequate.

Mark said very clearly that our Millie began to wait on the people in the house. To describe that, he used the verb diakoneo, a word variously translated as wait on, minister to, or serve. That word hints that Mark may have used this story to introduce us to the first Christian deacon. The message is even stronger when we realize that Mark used that word sparsely in his Gospel. The next time Mark uses this word he is quoting Jesus himself. Jesus used the word when he described his own vocation. In response to his disciples who were jockeying for position, Jesus said, "The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve" (10:45). The only other time Mark uses this verb for serving, it again refers to women. He identified the women who stood by Jesus at the cross as including those who "had followed him when he was in Galilee and ministered to him" (15:41). When Mark says that Millie waited on them, he is giving her higher praise than the apostles ever earned. He is telling us that Millie accepted the gift Jesus was offering the world and responded by becoming a servant like him.

Our other two readings offer different perspectives on the idea of service. Job's lament comes out of his tragic experience of having been blessed with plenty and then losing everything. While he might have felt that he had earned his good life, he was certain that he was not guilty of anything for which God should punish him by stripping him of wealth, health and even his posterity. Utterly frustrated in his desire for what he understood as justice, Job's experience of undeserved suffering ultimately opened him to a different concept of God and to compassion for others who suffer in innocence. The humiliation of realizing he had done nothing to earn his well-being any more than his suffering, opened Job to a more honest relationship with the God who loves saint and sinner, the strong and the debilitated. Job's theological reflections taught him about the God who desires life for all of creation. With that, Job was on the way to sharing faith with Millie and Paul.

What Paul adds to our discussion is his sense that once he came to know Christ he was impelled to serve Christ and the Gospel. When he says "Woe to me if I do not preach it!" Paul admits that the only way to be truly himself is to carry Christ's work forward. Like Millie, he knows that service is the only thing that makes sense of his life, not because he's looking for a reward, but because he is expressing what has come alive within him.

Today's Liturgy of the Word, invites us to spend time with three of our ancestors in faith. Job the theologian will caution us about any sense of entitlement, reminding us that nothing we can do merits life and the love of God. We can only receive them as free gifts. Paul the passionate apostle challenges us to evaluate whether our way of life and the messages we proclaim are true to who we are and God's life in us. St. Millie leads the way in showing us how to be faithful images of the Master. She demonstrates that sharing God's love can be as simple as setting the table and enjoying communion with anyone who comes.

Written by Sister Mary McGlone.
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