

5th Sunday in Ordinary Time - B

Note: Where a Scripture text is underlined in the body of this discussion, it is recommended that the reader look up and read that passage.

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

Job was a foreigner, not descended from Abraham. He was a wise and wealthy man from the Idumean city of Uz (located between Edom and northern Arabia); a region which was famed for its wise men (Jeremiah 49:7). Job believed in the true God, whom he adored and to whom he offered sacrifice; even when he was in the midst of his most severe suffering. Although Job is the subject of the book, he is not the author; the author is unknown although it has been surmised that he was an educated Jew, who probably lived in Palestine but who had visited or lived for a while abroad, primarily in Egypt. The author was well familiar with the prophets and the writings of the wise men of Israel. The book is believed to have been written around the end of the fifth century B.C., later than Jeremiah and Ezekiel, although Job may well have lived more than a thousand years earlier.

The background of the story of Job is this: Job, a pious and blameless man, is perfectly happy and contented. Satan implies to the angels of God's court that Job's virtue is not genuine. So, God permits Job to be tested. Blow after blow falls upon Job, depriving him of his possessions and his children. But Job remains faithful, and then is attacked personally; he becomes gravely ill and disfigured. However, he accepts with resignation the physical evil which God sends him, just as he had previously accepted the contentment he enjoyed. Such is Job's faith that Satan is defeated. But Job's suffering is so great that he utters a cry of lament (not of despair) when his friends try to console him. Job's friends consider his suffering to be a punishment for sin, which was the common view at the time, but Job insists that he is blameless. The friends invite him to recognize his fault and beg God's forgiveness. Although not claiming to be completely free from sin, Job maintains that the suffering is far greater than his faults deserve. Although he knows that God is just, he doesn't understand why God is sending him all these sufferings. Eventually it is learned that God sends evils and sufferings not only to punish people; their primary purpose is to purify man of his faults and prevent him from committing worse sins.

Our reading for today takes place when Job is having a discussion with his three friends. Here, we hear some of his lament; Job is speaking.

^{7:1} Is not man's life on earth a drudgery? Are not his days those of a hireling? ² He is a slave who longs for the shade, a hireling who waits for his wages. ³ So I have been assigned months of misery, and troubled nights have been told off for me. ⁴ If in bed I say, "When shall I arise?" then the night drags on; I am filled with restlessness until the dawn. ⁶ My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle; they come to an end without hope.

Job compares human life in general to forced military service, to the work of a day laborer, and to simple slavery – three wretched states in life.

⁷ Remember that my life is like the wind; I shall not see happiness again.

Job is addressing God. He is not offering a penitential plea as his friends have recommended, he knows he is not being punished for some transgression. Instead, he is telling God that he knows that God has a purpose for this suffering and that he will accept it.

2nd Reading - 1 Corinthians 9:16-19, 22-23

Having addressed the scandals which are evident in the Corinthian church (Cycle A), Saint Paul is now answering the questions which have been asked by this same church. For the last two weeks we have heard him address marriage and virginity. Now, we hear him begin to address their questions about eating meat which has been offered as a sacrifice to idols. This problem is a very practical one. A considerable amount of the meat that was sold in the market came from animals sacrificed to idols. Usually, only certain portions of the sacrificial victims were burned, the remainder becoming the property of the temple priests. Much of this meat was sold to butchers and was available at a lesser cost. Additionally, social life involving friends and family who were still pagans exposed them to common meals at family festivals, including some in the temple of a pagan deity.

The Council of Jerusalem, which took place around A.D. 48-50, had written to the Christians of Antioch, Syria and Cilicia telling them to abstain from food which had been sacrificed to idols (Acts 15:23-29). When Saint Paul was preaching in Corinth two years later, he may not have said anything on the subject, given the very pagan environment of the area – much different from Antioch, Syria and Cilicia. If the faithful at Corinth had to avoid meat of this kind, they would have had to isolate themselves from their fellow citizens.

In replying to this question Saint Paul first explains the general principles that apply: They may eat meat of this type, for idols have no real existence, but sometimes charity requires that they abstain from it; if it was thought that it would lead a new convert back to paganism for example by corrupting the conscience. Paul then illustrates what he says by telling what he himself does. It is from this illustration that our reading comes.

¹⁶ If I preach the gospel, this is no reason for me to boast, for an obligation has been imposed on me, and woe to me if I do not preach it! ¹⁷ If I do so willingly, I have a recompense, but if unwillingly, then I have been entrusted with a stewardship.

Preaching is the expression of Saint Paul's being a Christian, for this he deserves no special credit. The apostolate is a stewardship with which he is entrusted; he is obliged to fulfill it.

“The servant sent by the Lord does what he has to do even if he is not willing, because if he does not do it he will suffer for it. Moses preached to Pharaoh even though he did not want to (Exodus 4:10; 5:1), and Jonah was forced to preach to the Ninevites (Jonah 1:1-3:4).” [The Ambrosiaster (between A.D. 366-384), *Commentaries on Thirteen Pauline Epistles*]

¹⁸ What then is my recompense? That, when I preach, I offer the gospel free of charge so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.

Saint Paul is making a joke: the wages of one not entitled to any is to work for nothing. Saint Paul doesn't want any payment or support from the Corinthian church.

¹⁹ Although I am free in regard to all, I have made myself a slave to all so as to win over as many as possible.

He is not subject to the constraints of the financially dependent, he assures his livelihood.

²² To the weak I became weak,

In 8:13 Saint Paul submits himself to the conscience of the weak – if eating meat will cause someone to fall away, he won't eat meat.

to win over the weak.

Saint Paul makes it clear in 10:23 through 11:1 that the hearts of the weak also needed to be changed.

I have become all things to all, to save at least some.

Saint Paul is living out the commandment to love his neighbor; he shows no bias because of social or religious situations.

“Everywhere the Savior becomes ‘all things to all.’ To the hungry, bread; to the thirsty, water; to the dead, resurrection; to the sick, a physician; to sinners, redemption.” [Saint Cyril of Jerusalem (ca. A.D. 350), *Sermon on the Paralytic* 10]

²³ All this I do for the sake of the gospel, so that I too may have a share in it.

Since he is called to be an apostle, Saint Paul can share in the fruits of the gospel only by bringing it to others.

Gospel - Mark 1:29-39

Jesus is early in His public ministry. He has begun to gather His disciples around him and He has gone to Capernaum and has taught in the synagogue where He astonished all present with His teaching: He teaches like one in authority, not like the scribes (He says “I say to you,” not “the law says”). He speaks of what He knows and testifies to what He has seen (John 3:11). He does, and then preaches, unlike those who teach but do not do (Matthew 23:1-5). While at the synagogue, Jesus also heals a man who is possessed by an evil spirit. In doing this He gives the residents of Capernaum a very clear sign that God's salvation has come: By overcoming the evil one, Jesus shows that He is the messiah, the savior, one more powerful than demons. Our reading for today immediately follows this event.

²⁹ On leaving the synagogue he entered the house of Simon and Andrew with James and John.

This is thought by some commentators to be an eyewitness account. Notice that the inner circle of apostles (Simon Peter, James and John) are present

³⁰ Simon's mother-in-law lay sick with a fever. They immediately told him about her. ³¹ He approached, grasped her hand, and helped her up.

The Greek verb *egeri* is best translated as it is in the resurrection accounts of Mark (14:28; 16:6 and elsewhere) as “raised her up.” It is possible that the early Church viewed this event as a foreshadowing of the eschatological resurrection wrought in mankind through Christ’s death and resurrection.

Then the fever left her and she waited on them.

This detail suggests the completeness of her cure and the service expected of those who have been saved by Christ (Mark 10:43-45).

³² When it was evening, after sunset,

Still part of this eventful day at Capernaum.

they brought to him all who were ill or possessed by demons.

The two general categories of people who have been helped by Jesus this day: the ill (Simon’s mother-in-law) and the possessed (the man in the synagogue).

³³ The whole town was gathered at the door.

The house of Peter and Andrew functions as the center of Jesus’ activity. The account in Matthew and Luke says it was Simon’s house.

³⁴ He cured many who were sick with various diseases, and he drove out many demons,

There is no distinction meant between the “all” who were brought and the “many” who were healed. The parallel accounts say all were healed (Matthew 8:16; Luke 4:40).

not permitting them to speak because they knew him.

The demons recognize Jesus’ true identity but are not allowed to disclose it because humanity must get a fuller picture of Jesus before they can know him as the dying and rising Messiah.

³⁵ Rising very early before dawn, he left and went off to a deserted place, where he prayed.

Jesus’ departure may have been prompted by false messianic hopes of the people of Capernaum. The other occasions on which Jesus prays (Matthew 6:46; 14:32-42) are times of stress connected with the true nature of His messiahship.

³⁶ Simon and those who were with him

Notice that whenever the disciples are enumerated, Simon (Peter) is always listed first – an indication of his primacy.

pursued him ³⁷ and on finding him said, "Everyone is looking for you."

The Greek word *zetein*, translated here as “looking,” when used in Mark is always associated with evil intention or at least a misguided sort of seeking (8:11-12; 11:18; 12:2; 14:1, 11, 55; 3:32; 16:6). Simon implies that Jesus should remain in Capernaum and capitalize on the popularity He has aroused with His miracles.

³⁸ He told them, "Let us go on to the nearby villages that I may preach there also.

Jesus refuses to confine His ministry to one place or to encourage the messianic hopes of the crowds.

For this purpose have I come."

Jesus undertook His mission in order to proclaim the kingdom of God (Mark 1:14-15).

³⁹ So he went into their synagogues, preaching and driving out demons throughout the whole of Galilee.

This summarizes what Jesus has done so far and what we have learned of Him so far: now His field of activity embraces “the whole of Galilee.”