

Fidelity to Prayer and the Value of Life

February 7, 2021, Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Gospel of Mark 1:29-39

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In our Gospel today, we see another episode of healing as Jesus moves forward in his mission of announcing the reign of God in a world given over to sin and evil. On this occasion, we learn it is the house of Simon and Andrew and Simon's mother-in-law is in bed with a fever. Without delay, they inform Jesus of this and Jesus *'came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then, the fever left her and she began to serve.'*

The healing was not the overt purpose of the visit as Jesus only found out after they had arrived. But Jesus acted immediately and she was made well. And with her healing came her resuming her service. With **healing follows a response to the call to serve**. But in what way are we to serve and how much?

St. Paul, in our second reading says, 'I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some.' Paul's life is oriented toward his mission ever since his own healing (ie. his conversion).

In this context, being all things to all people may have something to do with the Christian receptivity to being sensitive to wherever the other person is at, without judging or distancing ourselves.

Going back to our Gospel, after the healing of Peter's mother-in-law, word must have gotten around rather quickly because that evening, at sunset, *'they brought to Jesus all who were sick or were possessed by demons.'*

So you can imagine, after bringing Peter's mother-in-law back to health, news got around like wildfire - - and that's without texting, twitter, or social media the amazing and instant healing that took place at Peter's house. The next thing you know, there is a massive crowd gathered for healing.

The Gospel says, *'the whole city was gathered around the door. 'Jesus cured many who were sick and cast out many demons and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.'*

If one takes a moment to imagine the chaotic environment that must have ensued, probably for many hours, one cannot help but think of our present world and our overcrowded hospitals now because of the Covid virus. The doctors, nurses, first responders, are in so many situations, overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of patients to be treated. We hear stories of the terribly difficult choices medical people have to make in choosing who gets to be treated and who is to go untreated because there is not enough medical staff to meet the demand. And there is the massive undertaking of the distribution of vaccines. Let us not forget the stress of our teachers and parents

scrambling to assemble an education plan in an ever-changing scenario of positive cases of the virus. There is overwhelming demand and not enough resource.

Jesus did what he could with his personal touch which was a fundamental aspect to his healing ministry but even he, eventually stopped and pulled back in order to be still and restore himself. He went off early in the morning to be by himself to pray. And Simon and his companions hunted him down as if to say, 'there are more people to see you, let's get back at it'. Jesus is fully aware that he is not there for an assembly line ministry. He must move on to other communities to proclaim the message of God's kingdom.

Each healing Jesus does is good. Yet 'good things' can actually get in the way of serving God well. To serve God well, a person needs to not just endlessly do good things that others want them to do. One has to do those good things that God has CALLED that person to do. It takes prayer and consideration to figure out which way to go. It may also take prayer to figure out which good things to turn down. In this context, we cannot be all things to all people. People who are people pleasers have a heck of a time with this. Availing oneself endlessly for good deeds without reflection is not what is needed in order to serve God well. What is needed is **prayer first** and **fidelity to that which the Lord has called you to**.

Secondly, there is value to life beyond what we can productively do for others. We see in the first reading from Job as he expresses his weariness in his plight. Everything he had gained has been taken away from him, his family, his land, his livelihood and even his health. His friends suggest to him that he needs to confess his sins because obviously it was something he did to offend God that brought this all about. The temptation is to think there is something he should or should not have done, or something perhaps he should be doing now to fix his situation. Job's situation represents any one of us when we realize we have no control in our lives. This pandemic has taken away a lot of our control.

Nevertheless, Job maintains his innocence, even in his despair, he did no wrong before God and his faith in God somehow remained intact, even though he had given up on things ever changing. His situation seemed hopeless by all accounts but he was not without trust in the **value of life itself**, despite his circumstance - - despite the fact that he was feeling that things would never change. This perhaps turns us inward and is pause for reflection on how we perceive our relationship with God, though difficult to navigate through and often impossible to see or experience when we are in deep peril, is still there and very real if we but persevere and trust in Him.

We are all searching for our Lord as were those who hunted for him when he went away to pray, perhaps we can look for Him in our secluded moments, in our intimacies with friends and loved ones, in our social compassion, and not so much in quantity of what we believe is accomplishment.