

5th Sunday in Ordinary Time, 7 February 2021

Scriptures: Job 7:1-4, 6-7; 1Corinth. 9:16-19, 22-23; Mark 1:29-39

Homily: Fr. Ken

In the first reading, Job does not appear like a man with hope. He is feeling the misery of the world, not unlike many, many people today amidst the coronavirus pandemic. He has become pessimistic about life. In his sickness he lies on his bed and feels a terrible restlessness as he waits for morning, and then frets till evening comes.

In the Gospel, however, we see how the crowds who suffer like Job are nonetheless drawn out of their despair by the very healing touch of Jesus.

Here is a light amidst the gloom. Jesus has announced the Kingdom of God, and now we find him healing sick people and casting out evil spirits.

This is exactly why he has come: to preach a message of hope to a suffering world.

Jesus teaches. But so often he has to literally reach out to touch the sick people who are pressing him for healing.

Much of Mark's Gospel is taken up with Jesus' miracles of healing because this is what a wounded world demands. Some are dramatic stories, but others, as we read in the Gospel for today, are small more domestic simple cures. In Simon's house Jesus goes to the disciple's mother-in-law, lying with fever on her bed. He takes her by the hand, helps her up, and she is healed and given new hope.

But Jesus does not want to be seen as a wonder-worker. His healing goes deeper. He forgives sins and heals spiritual sickness. And then at the end of his own life he shares our suffering by identifying with those who are poor and outsiders. He undergoes

their fate by being crucified. It is only on the cross after he has suffered that Jesus will gain the full recognition of being both Messiah and Son of God.

In a Western society like ours, which highly values those who are young, good looking, healthy, and wealthy, the very acknowledgement of sickness and even death does not go down very well.

But the Bible has no qualms about facing these realities. It tells us outright that we are mortal, and allows us to lament our suffering just as Job did in the first reading.

Jesus confronts the misery of the world head-on. He makes the healing of sick people central to his ministry. By entering fully into the misery of the world through his cross and resurrection, Jesus becomes for us a source of healing. Optimism is a feeling that things will get better; but Christian hope is rooted in a person, the very person of Jesus who has triumphed over death.

In the light of that hope, we can pray to God for healing in many ways. God works through the skill of the doctors and nurses in modern hospitals. But the Lord works as well in our communities through divine presence among us, including through the sacraments of healing. In Baptism we are cleansed by our entry into the Christian family. In Confirmation we are strengthened and enlightened in the Spirit. In the Sacrament of the Sick, Christ continues his healing work among us through the laying on of hands. But we are also healed, as Peter's mother-in-law was, by care in our homes through the loving concern of our fellow Christians.

Healing is not always dramatic, but we are called to walk slowly in hope: "one step at a time".