

**FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME CYCLE B 02-07-2021**

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

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

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

Gospel = Mark 1: 29-39

As we pray, worship, work, and go to school during this pandemic and turbulent world we have all experienced joys, sorrows, challenges, suffering and surprises. Things we must deal with immediately and those we can put off for a time. I pray you have discovered new blessings in your lives which lift you up and help you to continue moving forward. Especially a newfound love in Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

We can all relate that in our hardest times and most difficult decisions the God we desperately long to hear from speaks to us but he also can be silent, unreachable, and hard to understand. Today's first reading focuses on our friend Job, he has been where most of us do not want to go but find ourselves there anyway. Job's story can resemble our own pains and sufferings as we struggle to understand God's justice in the face of our broken experiences. Here's a quick summary of the book of Job.

Job is God-fearing, happy, healthy, wealthy, pious, and blameless, and enjoys God's protection and blessings. Suddenly, without warning, Job losses all his livestock, his seven sons and three daughters suffer various illnesses and accidents and die, Job suffers excruciating pain from severe boils that cover his entire body. Then for pity, support and consolation from family and friends, Job's wife, convinced that God inflicted this misfortune on him as punishment for some grave and hidden sin, tells him to, "Curse God and die." While three of his closest friends, also convinced that Job is harboring some secret sin life known only to God, press him to confess his guilt and plead for God's mercy.

Throughout the whole story, Job asserts his innocence, rejecting the notion that suffering is the result of sin, which is the opposite of what his friends believe. Job's emotions range from humility, persistence, praise and assurance to outrage and frustration as he presses for divine vindication. This direct experience with God gradually leaves Job at peace with himself and God as he declares, "I know that my redeemer lives... whom I myself shall see...my innermost being is consumed with longing" (Job 19: 25-27).

I highly recommend you read the entire book of Job reflecting on how bad things can happen to good people, why people of strong faith can experience momentary feelings of rejection, and your beliefs on the value of suffering.

Job's three statements, at the end of the book (Job 42: 2-5) give us more to think about.

1. Speaking to God, Job declares, "***I know that you can do all 'things.'***" As people of faith, these words may easily and often flow from our lips. But, when "things happen," how do our attitudes or actions match the words? Do we think the worst and waver in our trust? Are we gripped by fear and worry? If God can do all "things" should we not be rejoicing that he can do our "thing" - the "thing" we need most from him?

2. "***I have dealt with great 'things' that I do not understand.***" How often do we demand an explanation for everything uncomfortable that is happening in our lives? Instead, can we allow that God knows more and cares enough to work everything out on our behalf? Will we exercise faith over doubt and trust over impatience?

3. Speaking, again, to God, Job says, "***I had heard of you by word of mouth, but now my eye has seen you.***" God, for us, will only be "hear-say" or a reflection of another's experience

until we too have emerged from a valley of tears to an intimate walk of assurance and trust with him. We can “see” the Lord only with the eyes of a heart transformed.

These three areas have to do with trust, faith, and conversion of our hearts but they are not the answer to the problem of pain and suffering just part of the answer. I have been listening to podcast from Ascension press. The Bible in a year with Fr. Mike Schmitz. It gave me some good insight of the problem of suffering and pain during his reading of the book of Job. Even though the book of Job addresses the problem of why good people suffer and experience evil it does not give an answer to the problem.

God’s answer to the problem of pain and suffering is found in John 3:16 “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.” The answer is, he gives himself in the pain and suffering of his Son and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The cross is the answer. Jesus’ passion, death, and resurrection are the answer to pain and suffering.

And in our Gospel Jesus shows us a model of discipleship to be able to help ourselves and those experiencing pain and suffering in our lives. Jesus is about the business of restoring broken lives. Today’s gospel is a two-day glimpse of the activities of Jesus, the miracle worker. The evening before, he healed the sick, and many possessed with demons. Early the next day crowds of people came for more miracles, but Jesus was not there. So, Peter and the other disciples searched and found him in a secluded place where he went to pray. Imagine their shock when Jesus, instead of going back to the house, insisted on moving on. He didn’t want his mission defined only by miracle-working but would reveal his true identity as Lord and Messiah in the context of his entire life.

This two-day snapshot of Jesus with Peter and the other apostles provides a lesson in discipleship for us. Jesus going to a deserted place to be refreshed in spirit through prayer and communing with God the Father is key to the ministry of discipleship, which relies on spending ourselves in service to others, then returning to the Father for a time of prayer and communion, to be refreshed, refilled, and reenergized to go out and do it again.

Think of it this way. We are vessels of the Lord, holding within us the fruits of love, joy, peace, patience, mercy, forgiveness and wisdom. Our time with the Lord fills us to the brim. We then pour out those blessings received to others in need, emptying the vessel, and return to the Lord to be refilled. And remember sometimes we also need to be humble enough to receive those blessings from others. Giving and receiving is part of the process.

You and I can proclaim Jesus as Messiah and Lord only when we accept his way of suffering – Jesus willingly yielding to powerlessness on the cross – and finally his miraculous resurrection. Even in our own lives, restoration must often be preceded by a cross. For Job and all of us that are wondering: Yes, there is value in suffering! That value is in uniting ourselves with Jesus and being always in his care and presence.

Will our discipleship hinge on following Jesus on his terms or will we insist on conforming him to our standards of comfort, demands for quick healing, and privilege of selective belief?