

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time – February 7, 2021– Our Lady of Perpetual Help

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

Job spoke, saying: Is not man's life on earth a drudgery? Are not his days those of hirelings? He is a slave who longs for the shade, a hireling who waits for his wages. So I have been assigned months of misery, and troubled nights have been allotted to me. If in bed I say, "When shall I arise?" then the night drags on; I am filled with restlessness until the dawn. My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle; they come to an end without hope. Remember that my life is like the wind; I shall not see happiness again.

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

R. (cf. 3a) Praise the Lord, who heals the brokenhearted.

Praise the LORD, for he is good;
sing praise to our God, for he is gracious;
it is fitting to praise him.
The LORD rebuilds Jerusalem;
the dispersed of Israel he gathers.

He heals the brokenhearted
and binds up their wounds.
He tells the number of the stars;
he calls each by name.

Great is our Lord and mighty in power;
to his wisdom there is no limit.
The LORD sustains the lowly;
the wicked he casts to the ground.

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor 9:16-19, 22-23

Brothers and sisters: 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! If I do so willingly, I have a recompense, but if unwillingly, then I have been entrusted with a stewardship. 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. 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. To the weak I became weak, to win over the weak. I have become all things to all, to save at least some. All this I do for the sake of the gospel, so that I too may have a share in it.

Gospel: Mark 1:29-39

On leaving the synagogue Jesus entered the house of Simon and Andrew with James and John. Simon's mother-in-law lay sick with a fever. They immediately told him about her. He approached, grasped her hand, and helped her up. Then the fever left her and she waited on them.

When it was evening, after sunset, they brought to him all who were ill or possessed by demons. The whole town was gathered at the door. He cured many who were sick with various diseases, and he drove out many demons, not permitting them to speak because they knew him.

Rising very early before dawn, he left and went off to a deserted place, where he prayed. Simon and those who were with him pursued him and on finding him said, "Everyone is looking for you." He told them, "Let us go on to the nearby villages that I may preach there also. For this purpose have I come." So he went into their synagogues, preaching and driving out demons throughout the whole of Galilee.



Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time – February 7, 2021 – Our Lady of Perpetual Help

INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

A Jesuit friend of mine, who happens to be Polish-American, once invited me to dinner at his mother's house. This sounded quite agreeable. The only instruction I was given beforehand was, do not refuse second helpings. I was young and skinny and I knew I would even accept thirds. But Polish mothers take great pride in their traditional foods and in the many, many large bowls they serve up: all different foods, all delicious, all astonishingly filling. I ate and ate and ate until ...the fearful moment arrived. Here, have some more, oh my goodness you don't have anything on your plate, take some of this, and this. You are going to starve. You won't be ready for dessert if you don't eat your meal! Luckily I did not roll my eyes. I took a portion of each, as little as I could politely do, then dealt with the really delicious dessert. I took my stuffed self away from the table, graced with a new Polish mother, and with a nap on the couch.

Why do I tell you this? Because Simon's mother-in-law in the Gospel must have been just like this gracious woman. I'm sure the mother-in-law would be hustling and bustling, stirring up welcome, dish after dish after dish if she were here today. Jesus seemed to be immersed in his new career of preaching, curing, driving out unclean spirits, showing the great tenderness of God for people. But when he and the apostles stopped by one day, Simon's relative was ill and helpless. How much out of character it was for this take-charge woman to crumple and just observe her guests. He took her hand and without ceremony healed her. He lifted her up from her sickness—and then she waited on them"! (Didn't I say Simon had a Polish mother?) By contrast, in the First Reading we hear ancient words of Job, who does nothing in this reading but complain because everything has been taken away from him. "My life is like the wind," he says; "I shall not see happiness again." *I have been assigned months of misery, and troubled nights have been allotted to me. If in bed I say, "When shall I arise?" then the night drags on; I am filled with restlessness until the dawn.*

Many of us recognize such words from our own lives. And Job lost more than sleep. He had formerly been prosperous, with a wife and servants, children, land, livestock, and a sterling reputation to boot. *I rescued the poor who cried out for help, the orphans, and the unassisted, ...the heart of the widow I made joyful, ...I was eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame was I* (see Job 29:12). Did he deserve such huge deprivations? For that matter, did Jesus deserve losing not only his frequent meals with people, his preaching and curing and befriending? When he hung on the cross could he remember his mother's meals? This much we do know: loss is part of life. The blessings we are given can drop and shatter. Instead of overeating, so many today starve. God knows this too. He stays with us either way. God is "Father and fondler of heart he has wrung," to quote the poet Hopkins. Instead of "erasing trouble," Christ lets his love do the job of consolation. Be with God.

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. Could God have redeemed the world by saying a word, or breathing on it, or sending his son merely to be with us? Why do you think God chose a suffering Messiah to redeem humankind?
2. What drove Paul to the point that he would do anything for the sake of the gospel? What drives you to do the things that you do?
3. "Rising very early before dawn, he left and went off to a deserted place, where he prayed." How does this fit with his tireless effort to carry out God's ministry? How close are you to Jesus in using all your energy for some purpose? What is that purpose?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

Keep your family safe, O Lord, with unfailing care, that, relying solely on the hope of heavenly grace, they may be defended always by your protection. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen