

Jesus approached Simon's mother-in-law, "grasped her hand, and helped her up. Then the fever left her and she waited on them" (Mk 1:31). Every story we hear in the Gospel has a context beyond what Christ did for an individual while he was alive. Very often, the biblical text of the New Testament correlates to the life of the early church, and in this case the original audience for the Gospel of Mark.

What Jesus does here, flows out of the story of his own baptism. Jesus is now engaged in preaching, teaching, healing, and exorcising demons. In the case of Simon's mother-in-law, Jesus grasped her hand, and raised or lifted her up. She was baptized giving her new life and her response is one of service or ministry. "In the early church, everyone who was baptized was expected to share in the mission and ministry of the Church."ⁱ This pastoral ministry was focused on the needs of the church itself, quite different than an Apostolic ministry focusing beyond the church to the world and its need for salvation.

At the end of Mass, we are invited to "Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord" to a world hungering for Jesus. As others hear the good news from the lips and lives of those who have been transformed, they are attracted and drawn into the church by the healing power of Jesus. In Mark's Gospel, the whole city gathers at the front door of the home of Simon and Andrew. Literally, it sounds like a very small community, but figuratively, if we think of a church community, then there is a far-reaching impact as the transformed community within the church invites everyone to come and see for themselves.

Our lives are often broken and fragmented. We are all in need of healing. Through the waters of baptism and the forgiveness of our sins, Jesus continues to offer cleansing that raises and lifts us up. If we read the gospel with an eye to the future, we know that Jesus raises the dead to new life. Once dead, a person is healed from all ills, and we have many stories of saints who continue a ministry of reaching out to others through intercession from the eternal shores of heaven. Today is the feast of Saint Hilary of Poitiers, the patron saint of those who suffer from snakebites.

Hilary was not raised as a Christian. He was taught to believe in a world with many gods as was common in pagan times. This did not make sense to him. As an adult, he was drawn to the idea of only one true God. He began to read the Scriptures and Jesus, the Father, and the Holy Spirit came alive for him. Hilary converted and was baptized a Christian. He was a learned and wise man and despite his own objections, he was chosen to be the Bishop of Poitiers. In the 4th century, the local church was involved in the selection of new bishops.ⁱⁱ

At that time, the church was embroiled in a heresy that denied the divinity of Christ. Arius falsely taught Jesus was not truly God. "Hilary opposed Arius' ideas and spoke out against him. He wanted everyone to know that it is through Jesus, God's only Son, that we are saved."ⁱⁱⁱ As happened often in the church of the 4th century, Hilary was one of the holy bishops who was punished by being sent into exile.

During the four years he was banished from his diocese, Hilary continued to fight the heresy of Arianism through his prayer and study which informed his writings. In exile, he fought Arianism which had taken a much stronger hold in the East. He was so successful at this that the Arian heretics in the East asked the emperor to send him back home. Upon his return to Poitiers, he was greeted with a hero's welcome.^{iv} His best-known writing on the Trinity ends with this prayer:

Keep this piety of my faith undefiled I beg you, and let this be the prayer of my convictions, even to the last breath of my spirit: that I may always hold fast to that which I professed in the Creed of my rebirth, when I was baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit ...^v

ⁱ LaVerdiere, Eugene, *The Beginning of the Gospel: Introducing the Gospel According to Mark*, 72-73.

ⁱⁱ saintsresource.com/hilary-of-poitiers

ⁱⁱⁱ franciscanmedia.org/saint-of-the-day/saint-hilary-of-poitiers

^{iv} Rengers, Christopher. *The 35 Doctors of the Church*, 43.

^v *Ibid*, 45.