

5TH SUNDAY IN OT—Year B—M02-D07-Y2021

01. *“...like a labourer who looks for their wages, so I am allotted months of emptiness, and nights of misery are apportioned to me. When I lie down I say, ‘When shall I rise?’ But the night is long, and I am full of tossing until dawn.”*
02. With these words from the first reading, Job describes an experience that I think **many of us can relate to at some point in our lives—and that many undergo on a regular basis.**
03. And even though I don’t think that Job was necessarily depressed in the clinical sense—**what he describes so well could certainly be considered: symptoms of depression.**
04. For although Job was a unique figure in the Old Testament, who experienced a unique set of circumstances—**the anguish and the emptiness he describes is unfortunately NOT THAT UNIQUE** — because there are many among us who experience this kind of anguish DAY IN AND DAY OUT — **not necessarily because of a unique set of circumstances, although circumstances can make the experience worse—but simply because they are dealing with mental health afflictions.**
05. For this reason, I wanted to preach on something **I have given talks about, but that I’ve never really dealt with in a homily—and that is mental health.**
06. I wanted to do this partly because ONE of the **many devastating effects of covid-19 is the impact it’s having on people’s psychological well-being**—something that has been on the news a lot lately—**but something that can STILL easily be overlooked.**
07. And so, I wanted to address this topic because our Faith is meant **to engage and address real-life issues—not gloss over them, or pretend that they don’t exist.** In fact, before becoming a priest, I used to hate it **when things were happening in the world—things**

that were on everyone's minds—and yet, these things were not being addressed at the pulpit.

08. I don't necessarily mean that the pulpit should be the place where we engage in **political discourse and controversies**—**but it should be the place where we address things that everyone is experiencing and thinking about**—because our Faith does have something to say about these things—**and can address them in a way that does justice to the spiritual dimension of the human person.**
09. I also wanted to preach on mental health, because, **as a priest—mental health issues are one of the most common things I hear about**—which means that many of God's People, many Christians, are suffering from mental afflictions—**because, unfortunately, our Faith does not make us immune to these issues.**
10. And so, for all these reasons I wanted to address this topic because **our Faith definitely has something to say about the importance of mental health.**
11. In my work as a priest, one of the things I often tell people—and one of the MAIN things that I believe our Faith has to say about this topic—is that it's extremely important **not to ignore symptoms of mental illness—symptoms such as depression, anxiety, feelings of emptiness and hopelessness, suicidal thoughts—these are all warning signs that something is not right**—and so, we need to pay attention to these warning signs and seek professional guidance.
12. **For just as a toothache is a sign that we need to see a dentist—so too depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts are signs that we need to see a doctor.**
13. In some cases, it may not be anything more **than the occasional ups and downs we all experience in life**—but in other cases, **it may be something more serious**—something that may need professional attention.

14. But either way, one should seek professional expertise to **determine whether these symptoms are signs of something more serious OR NOT** — because ignoring these symptoms is like finding a tumour on one's body and not seeing a doctor about the tumour.
15. So, if are experiencing things like depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts—take them seriously—as **you WOULD AND SHOULD take signs of cancer or diabetes seriously.**
16. And if you know someone who is experiencing these symptoms—**take that seriously as well—for we are truly our brother's and our sister's keeper**—especially in situations like these.
17. Obviously, I don't mean that **every time you have a bad day and are feeling a bit down you need to see a doctor**—but when a bad day becomes a bad month, or several bad months, or a bad year—and is starting to impact all areas of your life—**then it's time to seek professional help and guidance.**
18. Because **having mental health issues is no different than having diabetes or cancer**—for mental health issues are PHYSIO-LOGICAL afflictions just as cancer and diabetes are. But ignoring them **can prove to be just as dangerous as ignoring a cancerous tumour.**
19. For as someone who has personally lost two close friends to mental illness—I **know all too well the importance of NOT ignoring these signs, and of taking them seriously**—both in ourselves and in others.
20. Moreover, when it comes to mental illness **it's better to err on the side of being TOO VIGILANT about the issue than being TOO COMPLACENT about it.**
21. For just as our Faith obliges us to care for our bodies and to look after our PHYSICAL health—**our Faith ALSO obliges us to care for our minds, and to look after our mental health.**
22. Because we are not just a body, or a soul, or a mind—**WE ARE ALL THREE**—and our Faith obliges us **TO CARE** for all three — especially since **ALL THREE** are very intimately connected—so that

when one of these three dimensions of our being is afflicted the other two are afflicted in some way as well. **In other words, whatever is happening with our minds, will also affect our bodies and our souls.**

23. This is why it's ESPECIALLY important to look after **our minds, as well as our bodies—and why we are obliged to do so—**because neglecting these dimensions of our being **can severely impact the state of our souls and the quality of our spiritual lives.**
24. Meaning that if our **mental health is compromised—**it will have an impact on our spiritual lives—**because, AGAIN, all three dimensions of our being are interconnected—**and we have been entrusted by God Himself to care for all three.
25. It's really good that we're now talking about mental illness more and more—**and that the stigma of mental health issues is getting less and less —** because one of the things that our Faith has to say about this topic is **that it's important to keep talking about these issues and bringing them into the light —** that it's not good to pretend that they don't exist — **because our Faith is not about hiding issues and pretending that they're not real — our Faith is about confronting issues head on—**bringing them into the light so that their power of over us is diminished.
26. And one of the best ways to do this is **to talk about the reality of mental illness OPENLY AND HONESTLY—**whether we are going through it ourselves—or know of someone who is going through it—**it's important and necessary to talk about the issue to those we trust.**
27. And this should ALWAYS BE DONE in a **spirit of love and compassion—as our Faith ALSO obligates us NOT TO judge anyone dealing with mental health issues —** because afflictions of the mind are NOT SIGNS OF WEAKNESS OR A FLAWED CHARACTER—they are real PHYSIO-LOGICAL conditions just as diabetes and cancer are — **and just as we WOULDN'T judge**

anyone suffering with cancer—so too we **SHOULDN'T** judge anyone suffering from mental afflictions.

28. And just as we shouldn't judge anyone dealing with mental afflictions—so too we shouldn't judge **OURSELVES** if we're **struggling with mental illness**.
29. But this, **UNFORTUNATELY**, is one of the dilemmas when dealing with our own mental health issues—that we can **judge ourselves mercilessly—and take on the shame and stigma that society has imposed on mental illness in general** — which only serves to isolate us and make us reluctant to reach out for help.
30. But this is when it's especially important to ignore the voice of our society, and **EVEN the voice of our own flawed reasoning**—and listen to the Voice of God instead Who says to us: *you are My beloved, your illness does not define you, or make you less precious in My Eyes.*
31. And this is when it's also important to realize that if **you ARE dealing with psychological afflictions of any kind**—you are not alone — **you may feel alone, but you are not alone** — because **FOR ONE**, there are many in our society—**many ALL AROUND YOU, many UNKNOWN to you, suffering with the same issues** — and secondly, and more importantly, you are not alone because **God is with you in the midst of your struggle, and has not abandoned you.**
32. And not only is God with you—**He very much WANTS to heal you and make you whole again** — for as we heard in today's Psalm, **the Lord heals the broken hearted.** And because the truth we see reflected **TIME AND TIME AGAIN** in the Gospels, including today's, is that Jesus **has come to heal us and set us free from ALL afflictions, including those of the mind**—simply because God desires the very best for us, and wants us to be whole.
33. And so, when it comes to mental afflictions (and all afflictions for that matter)—**our Faith urges us to believe that God not only has**

THE POWER to heal us, but THE DESIRE as well — because, ULTIMATELY, belief is a choice—and in many cases, believing that God CAN and WANTS to heal us is half the battle.

34. This, of course, doesn't necessarily mean that God will do so magically or instantaneously—but **more often He will do so through time, effort, and prayer—because in most cases we have to meet God halfway when it comes to our healing** — for He wants us to use ALL THE RESOURCES in our community that He (in His great generosity and kindness) has made available to us for our well-being—including resources such as counseling, psychotherapy, and medication.
35. Because one of the traps that I sometimes observe with mental health issues is **people ignoring the science of mental health and mental illness—relying solely on prayer and spiritual solutions** — and although it's good to approach any kind of affliction from a holistic, well-rounded perspective, including the spiritual dimension—**relying ONLY on spiritual solutions is not wise** — because, **AGAIN, God has provided us many sources of healing in our community**—and He has done so primarily THROUGH SCIENCE.
36. And so, **it is important NOT TO ignore the science of mental health and mental illness—and just assume that prayer alone will remedy the situation.** Because approaching mental illness ONLY through spiritual means is like having a toothache and not seeing a dentist about it—you can pray until the cows come home for the toothache to go away, but eventually you will have to see a dentist.
37. This is why it's also important to remember that God created science—that science is not evil—and is not meant to be in conflict with religion — science is actually meant to complete and to complement religion—giving us a fuller, more complete picture of God's creation — in fact, religion and science are two sides of the same coin—religion being supernatural revelation and science

being natural revelation—and it's dangerous and unwise to ignore EITHER SIDE of this coin—especially when dealing with issues like mental illness.

38. Don't get me wrong, **prayer is absolutely essential when dealing with any affliction, including mental illness**—but in many cases prayer alone is not usually enough — **for as St. Augustine once said: *pray as if everything depends on God, and work as if everything depends on you.*** This is why it is necessary, and why our Faith urges us, to do all that WE CAN to cooperate in the healing that God wants for us.
39. In today's Gospel, the Disciples after looking for Jesus and finding Him say to Our Lord: ***Everyone is searching for You.*** But even though it may seem like **we are the ones always searching for God and wondering where He is during times of struggle—the truth is that God is the One Who is always searching for us — He is the One seeking us out—reaching out to us so that He can touch us, heal us, and transform us—ESPECIALLY when we are suffering.**
40. Because like a loving father, God has enormous compassion for our struggles and wants to be with us in our sufferings — and so, **if you are dealing with mental afflictions, once again, it's important to remember that you are not alone—because suffering of any kind does not separate us from Christ, but rather unites us to Him in a very real and profound way**—and to remember that God not only has the power to heal us, but the desire to heal us as well — in fact, **BELIEVE IT OR NOT, He desires our healing infinitely more than we do—and believing that and trust that, will take us far in our search for wholeness. AMEN.**