

Fifth Sunday – Year B

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

Life is unpredictable. Despite our best efforts to keep things right, something can go wrong at any moment. We can do everything in our power to make something work, but life might have different plans.

That's exactly what happened to Job whom we heard about in the First Reading.

Job was a very wealthy man. He had it all - a large farm, many flocks of sheep, camels, oxen, and a great number of work animals. He prided himself with seven sons and three daughters, though they didn't always live as virtuously as he had hoped. Job and his family had all the material possessions anyone could want. We can be sure he was admired and envied by the people of his day.

Unfortunately, one day something went very wrong. Job lost all of his children. He lost all of his property and he became afflicted with boils all over his body. Job's life made a complete 180-degree turn from the blessed life he had been previously living.

We can now imagine, Job finds himself at an absolute low point, describing his life as "drudgery", "misery", and "without hope". Things had gotten so incredibly bad for him that he laments,

"I shall not see happiness again."

Of all the biblical characters, Job is probably the one that nearly all of us can relate to on some level.

Most of us don't have lives that are without some type of pain or suffering or disappointment or disillusionment.

Many of us actually are living lives which aren't really that close to the lives we envisioned early on -- lives containing perfect partners, perfect children, perfect health, and perfect jobs.

Some of us have even gotten to the exact same point as Job, unsure as to whether or not we will ever reclaim a little bit of the joy or peace we so desperately long for. Job may be a character in the Bible. That much is true. But in a certain sense, he is you and me.

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Dear sisters and brothers in Christ:

The worries of this life can be overwhelming at times.

How often do we lie in bed at night worrying about our children and grandchildren, or parents and grandparents, their health and well-being, or economic situation, or whatever?

How often do we stop worrying about tomorrow? Will there be a day when we feel safe enough? Will we ever beat this vicious COVID virus? Will this pandemic be over soon? When can we gather safely with family and friends without covering our face with masks and shields?

The list of worries goes on and on and on.

Life is unpredictable, we all know. Always has been. Always will be. No one has to tell us that a challenging life can be overwhelming and feel as if the darkness is closing in.

In all of this, what we want is a little light, the light of a new day.

What most of us are hoping for is a new dawn to break, a new way of feeling, a new set of circumstances, a new reality, a new sanity and normalcy.

Dear friends, we can only look forward to a future with hope. Hope is a powerful force and probably the most important factor.

As the poet George Herbert has put it. “He who lives in hope, dances without music.” Hope provides the background music in our life; hope puts the spring in our step when, as they say, “the going gets tough and the tough get going!”

And that is the one thing about Job. Though he lost everything, Job never lost his hope. Though he could not understand why all this had happened to him, his faith and trust in God never wavered.

G.K. Chesterton, a great Catholic writer and apostle of common sense, used to say that the more hopeless things became, the more hopeful men and women must be. “. . . It is only when everything is hopeless that hope begins to be a strength [a virtue] at all,” Chesterton once wrote.

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It is true, isn't it?

That's why we're here celebrating the Eucharist in faith. That's why we are all here together, as our psalmist sings today, "Praise the Lord, who heals the brokenhearted." Moreover, we are here for we are a people of hope and our hope is in God, a God who is always there for us and with us.

So, don't let ourselves be overcome by life's unpredictability; don't let ourselves dwell on the words of Job:

"Is not man's life on earth a drudgery? Are not his days those of hirelings? . . . They come to an end without hope . . . I shall not see happiness again."

Of course, we are going to see happiness again. And I'm not talking about the eternal happiness that awaits us; I'm talking about here-and-now happiness because we have a heart filled with hope.

Life can be a drudgery at times. We know that. Like Job, our hope is the Lord, who will never and can never let us down. God cannot ever be anything but faithful to us.

So let's pray for one another that all of us can become better, stronger, people of hope! Remember, "Hope is a good thing, maybe the best of things, and no good thing ever dies." (*Stephen King*)