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Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time - 4 February 2024

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4 February 2024

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reflection by Gerard Moore

Introduction

In our Gospel we are led further into the early ministry of Jesus. The emphasis today is more on his healing, but it is closely related to his teaching and, now further, his prayer. The tempo of Mark's Gospel is brisk, but each passage leads to a more profound awareness of the mission of the prophet.

Today is the Sunday of the Word of God.

Penitential Act

Use one of the *Roman Missal* texts or this optional litany form:

Lord Jesus, you came that we might be healed. Lord have mercy.

You came that we might become slaves to the Gospel and liberate our lives. Christ have mercy.

You came so that those who suffer will feel the saving hand of God. Lord have mercy.

Collect

The oration

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,
God, for ever and ever.

The heart of this Sunday's collect is the petition that God, in devoted loving kindness, continually guard, protect and strengthen the community. The request is made out of the belief that the faithful are members of God's family. In this we belong to the divine household both as adopted children and as servants, implying a deep intimacy with God and a willingness to serve. The divine guardianship is an expression of

God's intimate devotion to us as the head of the household and, as such, carries the expectation that God will protect us.

The ancient manuscripts show the prayer was used early in the year, either in proximity to Lent or as a Lenten collect. This association highlights the helplessness the prayer expresses in face of sin. The only sure hope is reliance on heavenly grace.

The combination of God's 'care', custodianship and protection point to the intimacy with which God relates to the faithful. Further, these are associated in the prayer tradition with God's guarding, protecting, cherishing, ruling, defending and strengthening. The collect is insistent that the family of God continually need these gifts.

Acknowledgement

The discussion of the collect, slightly adapted, was composed by Gerard Moore for the Canadian liturgical journal *Celebrate!* (Novalis Press). Our thanks to them for permission to reuse the material.

First Reading

Job 7:1-4, 6-7

Job laments the way his life has turned, placing before God the thoughts and sadness of his heart.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 146:1-6. R. v. 3

Praise the Lord who heals the broken-hearted.

This psalm is a hymn of praise to a caring God. In God's abundance of power there is understanding beyond measure. This psalm reiterates all the answers that God has for Job.

Second Reading

1 Corinthians 9:16-19, 22-23

Paul places his entire self freely at the service of the Gospel, aligning himself with his hearers so that he may touch them as they are.

Gospel Reading

Mark 1:29-39

Jesus comes to village after village, synagogue after synagogue, to preach and to drive out demons.

Reflection

We will begin our reflections with the passage from Paul's first letter to his beloved community in Corinth. He offers a pastoral strategy that is deeply in line with the actions of Jesus yet deceptively difficult. Paul is free and unfree! As unfree he is compelled to proclaim the good news. It is a calling laid deep within him. His freedom comes from accepting the ministry. He does not go on mission for tangible reward but as a steward, albeit a compelled one. There is something of a parallel with the incarnation in this.

More interesting is that this leads to an open and free pastoral strategy. He brings the gospel to the level and reality of those to whom he is sent. The good news is not brought through superiority or arrogance, but weakness and service. From here we can venture into the first reading and the Gospel.

The immediate connection between our texts from Job and Mark does not quite do justice to either passage. We need to acknowledge that Job is suffering, and that Jesus is the divine response. The Book of Job is a profound meditation on suffering. Our reading calls to mind the symptoms of depression, and that is a part of it. However, the book takes us into the deeper sense of lament. All that Job possessed had been taken from him. What was a counted blessing has been removed without cause. His companions advise him to look to his faults. Job is not against this but prefers to take his concerns directly to God. This is the long path of lament and is ultimately successful. The passage is one entry into the mission of Jesus. He hears the lament of his people and responds with the good news that life on earth is not a sentence of drudgery but healing.

Our Gospel provides another Markan snapshot of the ministry of Jesus. There is a mention of his preaching with references to the synagogue at the beginning and close of the lection. The main focus here is on Jesus as healer and as a contemplative. There are some points to be brought out. Preaching, prayer and healing are combined. All are part of Jesus ministry.

His healing includes what we call exorcism and allows for the bad spirits in people to be released. This is not a world that we can easily imagine but is well known within indigenous groups and non-western cultures. What Jesus is bringing the people is new, authoritative and restorative: the sick and the possessed are restored to the community. With this there is an intriguing detail in the narrative. The people bring the sick and the possessed in the evening. There may be a case that this is after the day's work is done, but it is worth considering that those in need of healing are hidden away, kept under cover of dark. It is Jesus who allows them to be in the light. His success at healing and teaching raises questions for Jesus himself. He takes these to God in prayer. Is he doing the right thing? Will the people find freedom? Is his message authentic? What is it that God is saying to him through these gifts and powers? How will he work with the praise and thanks the people have for him? Where does this road lead?

We can also see here the early outplay of two theological questions. One is around Jesus. Who is he if he has the power to heal? This was taken up last Sunday with the sense of Jesus as prophet, but what kind of prophet is he, one who is so close to

God? The second is around healing and exorcism. Jesus' healing is a rebuttal to the popular view that illness and possession were somehow punishments from God. It will be difficult for the people and the leaders to let go of this notion. Jesus' message is not one of punishment but of healing.

There is a restlessness in this reading, and in Mark in general. The prophet and healer is keen to keep to his ministry. He seeks out other villages and will cover the region of Galilee. He sets his mark amongst the people, those far from the centre of power in a distant, distrusted and poor district. He is energised to meet all, yet his priority is amongst the far flung and impoverished.

As with the reflection for last Sunday, perhaps this reading serves us best when we substitute in the reading our church community for Jesus. Whom do we touch and heal with our words and our charity? What spirits in the local community do we face down and banish? Does our prayer and worship impel us to mission?



***He went off to a
lonely place and
prayed there.***

Prayer of the Faithful

Introduction

The word of God calls us to place our trust in the one who heals the broken hearted and so we bring our needs and the needs of this world.

Petitions

We pray for Pope Francis and the leaders of our church. May they be constantly inspired by the ministry of Jesus and be healers to the broken in this world.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for the leaders of nations that they will learn that healing the poor and broken hearted is the way to peace because injustice is the cause of war.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for all those who are broken hearted and in need of healing. May they feel the warmth of Jesus' healing hands through those who care for them.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those who are in despair. May they find answers to their distress as Job did, through the voice of God on this Word of God Sunday.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for all the people gathered here to break the bread and bless the wine. May our connection to the Eucharist be our strength so that we can go into the world and be healers and also, like Jesus, spend time in quiet prayer.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those who have died that they will rest in God's peace and we pray that those who mourn them will find loving and healing company on the journey of grief.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

Conclusion

God of the broken hearted, we offer all these needs in faith and know that you will answer them. We make our prayer through the power of the Holy Spirit and in the name of Jesus, the Christ.

Amen.

Music selections by Alessio Loiacono and Chris deSilva

Title	AOV1	AOV2	AOVK	CWB	CWBII	GA
Blessed Jesus, at your word				626	457	531
Bring forth the kingdom		4			647	478
Christ, be our light		3			540	404
Eye has not seen	146					466
Forth in the peace of Christ we go				681	489	495
Holy Father, God of might				705	503	424
Lord, whose love in humble service					551	
Lord, you give the great commission					308	313
Many and great, O God, are your works			123			
O Christ, the healer, we have come				759	127	
O come and sing to God, the Lord					175	
Praise to you, O Christ, our saviour	28				587	407
The beatitudes				817	456	489
The Church of Christ, in ev'ry age					613	
The cry of the poor	83				618	36
The servant song		169			461	487
The Spirit of God				832	388	185
The voice of God				835	621	476
We remember	81					446
Your hands, O Lord, in days of old					129	

Psalms Selected by Chris deSilva and Angela McCarthy

Psalm 146: *Praise the Lord who heals the broken-hearted.*

	CWB	JOBB	LPB
Psalm 146	362	pg. 55	pg. 98

Music selections by Michael Mangan

Heaven shall be yours (TCS) *Beatitudes* [Communion]