

Commentary to the 5th Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)



Christ healing the mother of Simon Peter by John Bridges

Fifth Sunday of Ordinary Time: His Touch

Demands Our Response Today's readings from scripture can raise a number of eyebrows. My first reaction is: "What in the world was that all about? The first reading begins with a horrible quotation from the Book of Job. "Is not man's life on earth a drudgery? Are not his days those of a hireling?

Then it gets worse. "My months are full of misery. I can't wait to get to bed, then I can't wait to get up. I shall not see happiness again? What a wonderful way to begin our Sunday. Then the Gospel reading relates the cure of Simon Peter's mother-in-law, who promptly gets out of bed and starts waiting on Jesus and the disciples. What's the deal here? Did Jesus perform a miracle and cure the lady of the flu so she could get up and make them lunch? Or maybe it was just a good joke on Peter. (Sorry, Pete, Mom-in-law will be around for a while.) Obviously, there must be tremendously deeper reasons behind each of these readings. The Book of Job is part of the Wisdom literature of the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament. Biblical wisdom literature often contrasts man's work with God's. Man is finite, his work is limited. More than that, most often man's work has no meaning whatsoever. This work of man's is contrasted with God's work, where every action has purpose.

What the wisdom books are saying is that apart from that which comes from God and returns to Him, all is drudgery. Simon Peter's mother-in-law was sick. She had a fever, maybe the flu. Jesus came and grasped her hand and helped her up. Her response to the touch of the Lord was to serve Him and His disciples. This was far more than performing her household tasks. What the Gospel writer was saying in this story of hurt and healing was something that all Christians recognize: when Jesus Christ touches us, we have no choice but to immediately enter into His service. That is the nature and power of His love. His love transforms us into a people of loving service. It is obvious that the people of our parish understand this. Many of you feel the touch of the Lord so strongly that despite your heavy schedules, you want to do more in service to the parish. I am being conservative in estimating that over 750 people spend a minimum of one hour a week in some form of service to the parish: some of you serve on Sundays at our Masses as music ministers, extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist, lectors, ushers,

altar servers; some are involved in educational and youth ministries, like our religious ed teachers, members of the RCIA team, helpers at our Early childhood center and Guardian Angels School, our Edge and LifeTeen programs. Many of you reach out to the poor, sick, elderly and bereaved, in our Caritas and Community Life Ministries. Some work to preserve and care for new life in our Pregnancy Center and in our Respect Life Ministry.

Our Women's Council and Knights of Columbus try to reach out to all these ministries. Then there are the administrative ministries like our money counters, finance and parish councils, etc. A few years ago, parishioners asked to begin new ministries, and so the Women of Grace and That Man Is You now Brothers in Christ spiritual experiences were begun. I would estimate that over 25% of our active parishioners, those who come to Church on a regular basis, are involved in some ministry or other. This extends from those who are elderly and homebound and faithful to the intentions on our prayer line all the way down to families with small children, and the children themselves. I don't doubt that a significant percent of the other active parishioners are involved in service that is not directly connected to the parish but, if it is charitable, it is directly connected to Jesus Christ.

People are continually saying, "If you have a need, Father, please don't hesitate to call? Why do we volunteer? Why do we feel obliged to make time to serve? Because Jesus has touched us. And we have held on to the hand that has helped us out of our sickbeds, we have accepted his touch. We have become disciples. Now we have no choice but to find ways to serve him. We do this primarily by serving his presence in each other and by serving his presence in others throughout the world. Many of your families have a rule that your children must be active in the parish choosing a ministry like serving, lecturing, singing, helping in religious education, or some other area. You are teaching your children responsibility to the parish as well as the need they have to respond to God's loving touch in their lives. We have about 70 young people in our confirmation program.

Most of them are freshmen in high school. They are guided through the experience of the confirmation by 30-40 sophomores, juniors and seniors who gave up their Sundays because God had touched them when they were confirmed and now they wanted God to use them to touch others. He touches us, raises us out of my sickness and calls us to serve. What tremendous meaning and purpose we have in our lives. Our lives don't suffer from the drudgery of Job's. Instead, we are like Paul who in the second reading became all things to all for the sake of the Gospel. Amazing Grace we sing. Jesus has raised us up.

We are no longer blind to his presence in the world. We see. We see his presence in others, and He sees His presence in us. It is all good, this following of Christ. We pray today that we might continue to be committed Christians, active disciples, loving people.

Fr. Joseph Pellegrino, SJ