

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Feb 8th 2015

The following reflection was written by Fr. Larry Gillick, S.J. for this Sunday, in 2012.

Job, in our First Reading, has had a hard time of it. He is downer and outer than anybody else in Scriptures. He is experiencing the crucible of fidelity. The Devil kind of makes a bet with God that if Job is squeezed enough he will cry out in some way of disbelief. The devil says that Job is a man of faith, because he has everything in hand and within his control.

What we hear is a most natural response to the questions which suffering can create. Job asks the usual questions about the meaning of life. We hear two such questions and then his tormentful musings about the meaning of his personal life and that of all humankind.

Job has been laid low by the hand of God. His family, his possessions and even his own physical well being have been removed. He is struggling to stay faithful. He is a most conventional or usual human being. These lines are his answers which are being wrenched from his mouth by the twistings of his body and soul. He has lost everything except some trust in the value of life, but very little at that. His “ouch” we all know in our own lives.

Our Second Reading, which is not usually thematically united with the First Reading and the Gospel, does have Paul’s spin on the meaning of life for him. Paul was an unusual man who found the meaning in life from his preaching the Gospel. Paul preaches what he has received, the Good News of the freedom from condemnation through Jesus Christ. This is his meaning and sharing it with others so as to save them for that freedom intensifies his peacefulness.

The Gospel continues our watching Jesus in His early days. He is curing humans, not of their humanity, but of those illnesses which prevent them from the usual way of living.

Simon’s mother-in-law rises from her bed of fever and begins doing something good with her being well. So many others were healed that when He went off to pray by Himself, His friends came to find Him. Everybody in town was looking for Him. He refused that invitation and left with His friends for other villages and folks to cure. Jesus had received His meaning for His life, His “purpose”, which was to be and live His being, the Good News. He was an unusual person.

I would want to be unusual and in many ways, thank God, I am. As with Job, I would desire to have the natural “ouchings” of life. I would not want to live a faith which trivialized losses, sufferings and confusions with easy answers. Eventually Job proved unusual in that he wrestled with God and the meaning of suffering-faith. I would desire to live the unconventional way Paul lived. He was not cool, nor cooled by what others thought of him and his way of preaching. I recently was told by someone attending a talk I was giving that I spoke too quickly and was boring. I had a little Job-like response of wondering why I was doing this and what was the use of it all. Whether it was a simple correction or an expression of frustration I do not know. I rose from my temporary bed of doubt-fever and went on with the talks. I would propose that this is a way of my being unusual, not odd, but not lying down in my Job-bed of self-question and saying doubting things about God’s workings through me.

I would desire to continue the unusual ways of Jesus who did not return to be celebrated and attract people to a worldly cult of physical healing and wellness. His moving on was His special way of living His identity. I would like to be unusual too in my following His way of resisting self-satisfying egoisms

If I am boring, so be it; I will try to be, not what you think I should be, but even more of who God has given me to be and Jesus has cured to do. My being desirous of being unusual is more of the interior variety. I do suspect that it does creep to the outside on various occasions. Job moaned about his condition. Paul rose from the dust of his condition. Jesus raised others from their demons and sicknesses to do something.

What Paul and Jesus did was not unusual for them. Paul had done the unusual interior work of hearing and believing what he had heard from Jesus. Jesus Himself had heard and believed what He knew Himself to be. We are invited to that same strangeness. What are our lives all about? Paul’s life’s actions and the works of Jesus made them both unusual, but for them, it was the life-thing, the ordinary, the real life’s work to do. Paul could not see himself doing anything else, living any other way. Jesus kept moving on to others, to us and always doing the work of bringing us to life. What an unusual way to live, bringing others to life in its many forms!

“O come, let us worship God and bow low before the God Who made us, for He is the Lord our God.”
Ps. 95, 6-7

Larry Gillick, S.J.Creighton's Deglman Center for Ignatian Spirituality