

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Feb 4th 2018

Recently a family in our parish went through a series of tragedies which required them to move. They are a three generation family, including a terminally ill grandmother, an elementary school age child, and the daughter/mother. They did not have the finances to hire somebody to move them, they didn't have a lot of friends who could help them, so they turned to me to see if I could find some help. In this case I turned to the Knights of Columbus and several people volunteered to meet on a Saturday morning and load the moving van. Several days before the day of the move, I started to get sick. On the day of the move I was indeed sick but I couldn't stand the thought of lining up a work crew to help me and then not showing up. Several days later the group needed to do another load and this time they told me to stay home. I think I felt a lot like Simon's mother-in-law in today's gospel.

She has been looking forward to Simon and his friends coming. The thought of having the new, dynamic teacher with them excites her. She wants everything to be just right. Hospitality is her thing. But she has a fever and cannot even get out of bed. I know that terrible feeling. All she wants to do is serve her guests and she cannot. What a delight it must have been for Jesus to cure her. In my case the irritation wasn't even the sickness; it was the inability to fulfill my offer of hospitality. You see the servant heart in Simon's mother-in-law; as soon as she realizes she is healed, she begins to serve the group and make them comfortable in her home.

We see the heart of a servant in Jesus, too. He spends most of the day healing the sick and they keep coming and coming until after sunset. "The whole town was gathered at the door." Jesus had to be worn out but he kept on serving. When he awoke from sleep the next morning, but before anyone else was up, he needed to get away to pray and he found a deserted place. Simon and the other disciples looked for him and on finding him essentially said, "Jesus, you've made it big. Everyone is looking for you. Now's the time to negotiate that big television contract or get an advance on a book." Jesus will have none of that.

Throughout Mark's Gospel Jesus appears to want no one to know who he is. The demons shout out who he is and he tells them to be quiet. Of course, Jesus doesn't need a recommendation from demons but it appears to be more than that. He heals people and then tells them not to tell anyone about it. Most of them go out and tell everyone they can. In today's story, Jesus can stay and make a name for himself but he says that it is time to move on. Why? Jesus is a servant of God. He does not come to make a splash - to impress people - to become well known. He simply wants to proclaim the good news and heal people.

How many servants of God have fallen away from their first love because of human adulation which led to pride? They made a name for themselves and true service to others became a thing of the past. They now spend their time marketing themselves. Is it possible to remain a humble servant of God when you are famous? Jesus shows us that it is. He knows who he is. He is not full of himself. He does not forget his mission.

Famous or not, may God grant us the grace to remember why we have been sent into the world and to fulfill our calling as servants of our Lord Jesus Christ.

