

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time B/2012

The readings of this Sunday talk about human suffering and the shady face of human existence. They invite us to realize that pain and suffering are an integral part of the human condition. But, they also offer us solace in the hope we have that whatever might be our suffering, Jesus bears it with us and he can even heal us.

In the first reading, Job cries aloud his pain to God in the midst of his suffering. In his claim, he shows how empty human life is and how a man is as nothing before God. He compares himself to a worker who longs for a rest he cannot have and waits for a wage he cannot receive. When he tries to sleep, all that he receives is a sleepless night that reminds him of the hopelessness of life and the near approach of death.

What is behind this text is the truth that human suffering reveals to us the fragility of the human condition. However, whatever might be the acuity of our suffering, God does not leave us alone. As he is at the source of our life, he can also console us and heal us.

All that helps us understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus, at the start of his public ministry, focuses on preaching the word of God and healing. First of all, the Gospel says that Jesus went to the house of Simon and Andrew with some of his disciples. As Peter's mother-in-law was sick, Jesus healed her and she waited on them. After that, he cured many other people who were sick with various diseases, including those who were possessed by demons that he drove out. Finally, he went throughout the whole region healing and preaching in their synagogues.

What do we learn from this Gospel? The first thing we learn is about the importance of health. In fact, when Jesus starts his public ministry with healing, he wants to show us how human health is important and how he cares for our wellbeing. As human experience has taught us, we all want to be in good health and in good shape. For that particular reason, we do whatever it takes in order to keep ourselves in shape.

However, in spite of our good will and all our efforts, we face the reality of sickness and disease that threatens our health and makes it fragile. It is in the midst of all this that Jesus comes to us with his healing power. Like in the case of the mother-in-law of Peter and other people of his time, Jesus heals us both bodily and spiritually.

It is that healing power of Jesus that the Church carries out in the sacrament of the anointing of the sick. In that perspective, when the priests visit the sick and anoint them, they bring into their homes and in the hospitals the healing power of Jesus, who heals, in an invisible way, our bodies and our souls. In the sacrament of the anointing, Jesus also strengthens us with his power to accept the outcome of our life which can, sometimes, end up in death. In that case, the point of the sacrament of anointing is to invite us to join our sufferings to the suffering of Jesus who gave up his life on the cross for our salvation.

This statement sheds light on the healing of the mother-in-law of Simon Peter and other people of Jesus' time. Although Jesus healed them, they eventually died. In that perspective, the healing of Peter's mother-in-law and other people has a character of exemplarity. It stands as an example for us about what Jesus can do for us and with us. What it means in reality is that Jesus heals us in many ways, physically, emotionally, and spiritually, but it does not mean that we can escape the reality of physical death.

Suffering and death are part of what it means to be human. That is why it would be an illusion to think that because we believe in Jesus we cannot get sick, suffer and die. In truth, there is no resurrection without passion and death. As we share in the life of Jesus through our baptism, we also share in his passion and resurrection.

The second thing I want to highlight is about the importance of striking the right balance in our actions. What do I mean by that? As a matter of fact, it is really delightful to see Jesus very busy with so many people who come to him. The whole day long, and without ceasing, people bring to him those who are ill and possessed and he heals them all.

Normally, as things are happening, we would certainly expect Jesus to stay in the midst of these people in order to enjoy the fruit of his work. Moreover, because of the success of such a ministry, we would think that he would keep healing as many as possible who were sick and could come to him.

In spite of that, however, the Gospel says that “rising early before dawn, he left and went off to a deserted place, where he prayed”. This episode teaches that work and the success of our enterprises are certainly good and valuable things. But, we should not be there only in order to work to the point of killing ourselves with activities. We need to be capable also of stopping and striking a right balance. That balance comes from prayer.

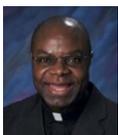
Of course, we have to work, but we have to balance what we do with a life of prayer. Jesus gives us an example of withdrawing and leaving everybody and everything behind him, in order to go to pray. By doing so, he is seeking this moment of intimacy with the Father in order to draw strength to keep working for the salvation of people and their healing.

If we could just listen to him, how peaceful our homes would be. How many people are worn out, and sometimes depressed, because all they know and do is only work. Today, their families are broken, their marriages are destroyed, and their children are lost, because they failed to strike a right balance in their activities. They failed to give a little bit of their time to the members of their families and relatives.

Do not get me wrong. What I am saying is not that work is a bad thing. What I want to say is that we need also to bring God into what we do in turning to him through prayer so that he may bless what we do. We need to stop as often as we can in order to pray and offer to God our activities.

The last thing I want to bring is about the importance of spreading the good news of heaven through preaching. This is a duty that belongs to each one of us and according to our vocation. In this regard, St Paul stands as our model. Let us, then, pray that the Lord may give us his strength in his service. May he heal those among us who are sick and suffering of many ailments! May God bless you all!

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



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