

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B)

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Following the meditation on the Gospel last Sunday (Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B), I would like to continue to meditate on what Jesus does in Capernaum at the beginning of his public ministry according to the Gospel of Mark. We know that Mark's is regarded as the first of the four Gospels to be put in writing, then followed by the other two, Matthew's and Luke's, with their own data. Because these three have many passages in common, the tradition of the Church has referred to Matthew's, Mark's and Luke's as the Synoptic Gospels. The Gospel of John is thought to have been written later than the other three, based on the different sources from those of the Synoptic Gospels.

In our diocese, public Masses have been suspended for another month following the guidelines of Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan that says: "When the national or prefectural government has declared a state of emergency and requested refraining from business and movement, the respective dioceses are to cancel Masses with a congregation."

1) Jesus leaves the synagogue and enters the house of Simon and Andrew (Mk 1:29-35).

After Jesus delivered a man possessed by evil spirits at the synagogue in Capernaum in the morning, he left the synagogue and went to the house of Simon and Andrew. This is very important because it describes a Christian community centered on Jesus. Jesus passes from the synagogue, the official place of the Jewish religion, to the house where daily life is lived with those who are dearest to him. In this house the new family of Jesus will be grown.

On entering the house, the disciples know Simon's mother-in-law, bedridden with fever, cannot go out to welcome them. It seems that the people who lived in the area around the Lake of Galilee suffered from fever transmitted by mosquitoes living in the swamps. When Jesus was told about her, he broke the rule of the Sabbath again. For him, restoring a healthy life of people is more important than formally observing the religious laws.

Mark's Gospel records in detail what Jesus did to Simon's mother-in-law: "He approached." The first thing Jesus did was approaching someone suffering, looking closely at her face, and sharing her suffering. Then he "grasped her hand and helped her up" without fearing the Law of Moses that forbids to touch the sick because he wanted her to feel his healing power personally. Then "the fever left her and she waited on them." Through this event those who were with Jesus learned that he is the one who dwells among people, stretches out his arm, and raises them up. It also shows us that the followers of Jesus must live their lives by accepting one another, taking care of one another, and helping one another.

But it would be a mistake to think that the Christian community is a family that thinks only of its own members and lives with its back turned to the suffering of others. Today's Gospel continues to tell that "after sunset," when the Sabbath was over, "all who were ill or possessed by demons" were brought to Jesus.

We the followers of Jesus must keep this scene in our hearts. When the evening came, the whole town gathered with their sick, at Simon's door. The hopeful eyes of the sufferers seek the door of the house where Jesus is.

The evangelist Mark has a message for us today: The suffering people will be truly drawn to the Church only when they can discover within her Jesus who relieves suffering and cures sickness. Pope Francis insists that our communities should be like a "field hospital" where people can go and receive help at any time.

2) Rising very early before dawn, Jesus went off to a deserted place, where he prayed (Mk 1:35-39).

The Gospel summarizes the daily life of Jesus and shows us how important prayer was and how frequently he prayed in his life. Jesus' life project was centered on healing the sick, sharing food with the hungry and easing the suffering of people. Realizing this project required Jesus to pray to the Father. The Gospels abound with details on this matter (for example, see Mk 1:35, 6:46, 14:32, 35, 39).

Prayer should not be reduced to a mere ritual: It is an experience of God, a time of grace in the face of human suffering when prayer is felt as a pressing need.

When Jesus felt the need to pray to the Father, he did not go to the synagogue but to a

deserted place and prayed there. Jesus in prayer teaches us something profound. His prayer is an obvious proof that Jesus was truly a human being. And like every other human being he felt the need for help from God.

3) A brief commentary on the First Reading (Job 7:1-7)

I conclude with a brief commentary on Job's suffering in today's First Reading. Job bares his heart and his disappointment in front of his friends. They want to teach Job who God is and how he acts. They accuse Job that he is suffering all this because he has committed some hidden sins. But God knows that. We can say that his friends speak about a God-fearing life far from life, that they cannot understand their friend's complaint nor accompany him in his pain, and that they make him feel guilty of something he did not do and increase his suffering.

When we hear Job's cry, we are aware that it is present in the daily life of many men and women in every corner of the planet. They're facing a life of struggle with difficulties in health, food, work, education, and social discrimination, etc.

The Book of Job is an existential reflection on the unsolvable problem, on the eternal mystery of "evil". After a long discussion with his three friends, Job ends up realizing that his suffering was not a consequence of the sins he committed, but a test of life that every human being will have to go through one day to mature as a human being, to strengthen his faith in God and to better understand the suffering of others.

Therefore, let us not be afraid to present to the Lord today, our suffering as well as that of our relatives, friends and acquaintances.

Note: All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New American Bible, Revised Edition (NABRE).