

## Fifth Sunday of Ordinary Time: Pray for Healing

Today's first reading from *Job* is exactly what we do not need as we try to navigate our contemporary difficulties. The first reading starts out with:

*"Is not man's life on earth a drudgery?"*

and then it gets worse:

*"I have been assigned months of misery, and troubled nights have been allotted to me.*

*If in bed I say, "When shall I arise?" then the night drags on; I am filled with restlessness until the dawn. My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle; they come to an end without hope.*

*Remember that my life is like the wind; I shall not see happiness again."*

What a way to start Mass particularly for people sick and tired of being sick and tired from the flu, Covid, and what have you, as well as being stretched out financially, and, well, we won't even mention people's hypersensitivity regarding anything even remotely political. Most of us feel like the characters in the comic, *Pearls Before Swine*, who find the best solution to the world is to stay in bed.

Thank you, Church, but we really do not need *Job* today.

Or do we? Perhaps, we need *Job* to remind us that there is so much more to existence than the physical here and now. The main section of the *Book of Job* concludes with Job recognizing that he will never have the answers to his problems. He has to place his trust in God.

Jesus lived in a world of problems. Emperors, kings and dictators routinely abused their subjects. The Jewish people particularly suffered. Some of this they brought on themselves. They didn't seem to understand that they had been conquered by Rome. They went out of their way to challenge the conquerors whenever they could. And then it would be routine for them to be tortured to death by crucifixion. After the Romans put down the First Jewish Revolt from 66-74 AD, it is said (probably an exaggeration) that they ran out of timber to use for crosses. Debtor prison, something we do not have now, was a reality back in the time of the Lord. People would be thrown into the prison, perhaps even tortured while they were there. Their frantic family would have to find a way to come up with money to get them out. Slavery was not just a racial reality as it would be in later centuries. Anyone could be enslaved, particularly as part of a conquest. And then there was sickness. There was so much sickness, so much misery. We read in the Gospels people suffering from leprosy, paralysis, epilepsy. We hear about the blind and the deaf. We even hear about a lady with a delicate personal problem. It is no wonder that large crowds of people continually pressed on Jesus pleading with Him to heal them. And Jesus did heal many people, lepers, a man with a withered arm, cripples, and many, many more.

Notice, though, what Jesus did before he healed people. He prayed. He prayed to His Father. His human nature stayed in touch with his divine nature as he went off to a deserted place to pray. And His prayers were answered with such power that he could heal.

We do not know the reasons why there are so many problems in the world. We do not know why good people suffer. We do not know why children die. We do not even know the extent of suffering around us. What we do know is that if we keep a union with God, we can see all difficulties for what they are, temporary. "This too will pass," the wise say. And so we meet challenges head on knowing that God will fight with us, helping us win the battle here so we can join him in the eternal celebration of His victory.

And so, we pray. We welcome the spiritual into our lives. We welcome the Presence of God into our lives and witness Him strengthening our faith life. And we witness the power of prayer. Over and over again I hear people tell me stories of how they or their loved ones survived and grew closer to God due to prayer. One of my doctors had to step aside from his practice because he became severely ill. His doctors told him that he probably would not survive. "But," he told me, "people prayed for me. And I have benefitted from a miracle." I have witnessed people being healed through the sacrament of the sick. And how many people have gone to healing services and been healed? It is not the person who leads the service who does the healing. The healing is due to the power of God answering prayers.

Scores of people pushed against Jesus. They wanted to be healed. Jesus knew that sickness was not part of the Father's plan. These people were suffering the result of man's choosing death over life, choosing to push God aside in favor of the material world. They were innocent as individuals, but they all suffered from mankind's guilt. Jesus' heart went out to them. He hurt for them. He healed them.

Jesus heals. He heals the pain not just of the people of the past, those people we hear about in the Gospels. Jesus heals the pain of the people of today. Some receive physical healing immediately. Others receive healing in stages. All who call out to the Lord are healed. Some are healed physically. Some are healed emotionally, able to accept their condition in life. All receive spiritual healing as they unite their pain to the Cross of Christ.

We who carry Christ within us, carry within us the one who heals. If we believe in Him, if we trust in Him, then we refuse to join Job's cry of despair. We recognize that Christ is present when we need Him the most, healing our internal and our external turmoil. We need to remember: we are not alone. Jesus is always with us. The last words of the *Gospel of Matthew* are so important: "Know that I am with you always until the end of time." He is here to protect us from the doubts and despair that plagued Job. He is here to give us the courage to walk with Him over the threshold to a new life.

Today all of us are told that when we are suffering, in any manner whatsoever, we must reach out to the presence of God. We believe that He is present for us; that He is with us. We believe that He cries out with us sharing our pain. We must use this special presence of the Lord as a way to come closer to the God who loves us, who was one of us, who died for us, and who gave his life, eternal life, to us.

So we ask our God, "When the difficulties of our human condition weigh heavily upon us, dear Lord and Divine Lover, teach us how to pray."