

## **Deacon Jim's Homily—Fifth Sunday Ordinary Time—Year B 2024**

A number of years ago in our Biblical Theology formation class, professor Doug Bushman from Ave Maria University asked us a very interesting question. If you were to start teaching a class on biblical theology, where would you start? Thinking that he may have been playing a little reverse psychology game, we suggested the Book of Revelation. He said that was not the correct answer. So then we thought the answer would be, the Book of Genesis. Once again, the answer was incorrect. He said that the best place to start was in the book of Job. Now I have to admit, I never really had heard of that book in the bible at the time, let alone know the story. Professor Bushman shared with us that is the place that he starts for a number of reasons, one of the main one being that it really talks about our human condition in the world. Let me explain.

In the book of Job, God and the devil actually make an agreement amongst themselves, I guess that you could call it a “bet”. The devil told God that Job only likes God because He has blessed Job with so many things and that if those things went away, he would in essence forget about his faith and turn his back on God. God disagreed with the devil, but he allowed the devil to take all the things away from him, but the devil could not touch Job. I won't tell you all the rest because it deserves a prayerful read, but Job does endure much suffering and, in the end, does not lose his faith in God and finds healing even though his possessions are taken from him. I won't spoil the ending, so you will have to read the book.

This weekend, the readings speak to us of part of the human condition of suffering, but also the call that we have through baptism to go out and preach the word of God. In the First Reading from Job, we hear about his plea and his anguish after losing so many family members and possessions.

In the second reading from St. Paul, he writes that he became weak to win over the weak and he made himself a slave so that he could win as many people as possible over for Christ.

In the Gospel today, we hear about Jesus and his continuing mission to journey throughout the whole area of Galilee to proclaim the Gospel and also heal the sick. So, we may ask ourselves, how can we live out this gospel in our lives as most of us are not health care workers or medical professional or have divine powers to heal.

This gospel is truly a model for Christian ministry. We all know that many people suffer in our world today. Last week Father Xavier shared the suffering that sometimes comes with anxiety and mental illness in our society. But we are also faced with physical suffering with illnesses such as cancer, heart problems, diabetes, covid and other viruses which can all affect our physical human body. There is also other suffering in this world from loneliness, depression, bullying, homelessness, drug addictions, etc.

There are two things that stand out for me today that I believe we can all take part in the message that is given to us in the scriptures today. First, all of us have dealt with different experiences in our lives when it comes to suffering. Whether it be us or others close to us. We can understand when St. Paul writes that he became a slave and also weak so that he could relate to the sufferings of his people. But St. Paul did not just sit and hold it to himself, he shared with others his sufferings and helped to lift people up from their sufferings, by sharing with them the good news of Jesus Christ.

Now, it may take some time to think about our journey and how our experiences can help others. My mom was diagnosed with breast cancer which had advanced to stage 4. She was crying one day when I visited and she asked me, why God would allow someone who prayed daily, taught religious education, was a lector in church and encouraged her son to be a deacon, to bear the cross of cancer. I did have to pray about that for a while and the Holy Spirit helped me with the answer for her.

I told her that I believed that God would walk with her on this journey and cure her of the cancer, but that God would also ask her to help others, by her experience to help others with their journeys as well. My mom was healed of her cancer and multiple times when people at the parishes I served were diagnosed with breast cancer, I asked my mom to call them and help them through their journey as well. Everyone that my mom helped shared with me how much that meant to them on their way to healing.

So, what experiences have you had in your life that you can help others on their journey of healing and sharing the Gospel? There is one line in the Gospel today that says, “very early before dawn, Jesus went off to a deserted place to pray”. After that he continued on his journey to preach and heal.

I would encourage you this week to find a deserted place where you can go to reflect on your life and ask God how you can help to heal people through the experiences that you have had in your own life. It is through silent prayer that God himself will guide you and encourage you. There are so many people in this world right now that need others to walk with them and are hungry to hear the good news of God’s healing power no matter what they are facing.

We are called, for this purpose to share God’s word and healing power. Are we ready to walk with him on that journey in our world today? Then let’s go out this week and share the Good News!!

*God’s Blessings—Deacon Jim*