

## **5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Cycle B, 2.7.21

Job 7:1-4, 6-7/

1 Corinthians 9:16-19, 22-23/Mark 1:29-39

### **SOME ARE CURED... ALL ARE HEALED**

I want to tell you the tale about two people on a mission – both very inspiring. One carries out his mission despite tragedy; the other carries out his mission with eagerness and determination. The first is the miserable guy in today's Old Testament reading: Job. I think we all know his story.



A very wealthy and successful man with a wife and family, property and livestock, who lived a righteous life as a man of God. All kinds of disasters suddenly befall him that take everything away from him and test his faith in God. Will he remain faithful despite his tragedies? In the end Job does keep faith in God, but we catch him today in the throes of his misery. He sounds like I do sometimes, maybe you too, after nearly a year of this miserable pandemic: *Life has become a drudgery. I've been assigned months of misery? Will I ever see happiness again?* Seems like a made-to-order theme for today's homily: *How to cope when life is getting you down?* Not a very upbeat message for Super Bowl Sunday -- the high holy day of football fanatics and super sales day for BevMo and Round Table Pizza.

The second person on a mission, perfectly appropriate for Super Bowl Sunday, is Kansas City Chiefs guard Laurent Duvernay-Tardif. Laurent, originally from

Montreal, Quebec, won't be involved in today's game on the field. Like you and me, he'll be watching it -- from his home in Canada. Back in July, before training started, Duvernay-Tardif opted out of the NFL 2020 season. Last year he was a Superbowl champion in the game that defeated the San Francisco 49ers, and brought the Chiefs their first Super Bowl victory in fifty years. On July 24, he announced he had chosen to opt-out of playing during the 2020 season as a precaution due to COVID-19. Duvernay-Tardif has been working as an orderly at a Montreal long-term care facility during the pandemic.



Regarding this unexpected move he said: *This is one of the most difficult decisions I have had to make in my life but I must follow my convictions and do what I believe is right for me personally.* Well, doing what was right for him meant putting his medical training to work, assisting on the frontlines in the fight against the coronavirus. You see, Laurent received his Doctor of Medicine degree from McGill University in 2018 after eight years of schooling. He balanced his dedication to a career in medicine with his passion for football.

He hasn't done his internship yet, but he said: *I had to be able to look at myself ten years down the road when I'm going to be a physician and ask myself if I made the right decision.* He said it wasn't easy to let go of the potential best year of

his football career and a second Super Bowl. This year, instead of running the gridiron, he walked the halls, compassionately serving the sick and suffering, doing whatever needed to be done, from inserting urinary catheters to feeding patients to changing bed linens. But he said what he learned while spending those months working at the facility outside Montreal was priceless. *I realized, he said, that those elderly patients, they were not going to go back home, either from COVID or something else.* Laurent reflected: *What really mattered? It's not the treatment, it's the caring. Making sure that your patients are comfortable, that they preserve their dignity. It's important to take the time to connect with these people. And I think down the road, that is going to for sure make me a better physician.*



I was moved by the personal story of this sports hero. Sports Illustrated named him one of its “Sportspeople of the Year” and Canada named him their country’s top athlete with the Lou Marsh Trophy. Yet, when he’s been asked about his awards and recognitions, he deflects the praise and says it should go to the legions of frontline Covid workers who labor overtime, forgo vacations and put their lives on the line every day for their patients. Like Job, who weathered the storms of his life and remained faithful, Laurent accepted his mission with determination and enthusiasm, at great sacrifice, to offer his

skill for the service and wellbeing of people in need.

Among the many titles given to Jesus, like Prince of Peace and Savior of the World, an appropriate title in light of today’s gospel is Jesus, the Divine Physician. The description in Mark’s gospel validates that title: *The whole town was gathered at the door. Jesus cured many who were sick with various diseases, and he drove out many demons.* Because he became one of us, Jesus knows the harshness of life and the isolation which sickness brings. He understands how someone’s spirit can be swallowed up by illness, how the hope of a brighter future is imperiled. In this gospel story we recognize the mission of Jesus: to heal the brokenhearted and to bind up their wounds. His healing touch goes out to all who come to him, and, if we invite him in, he will come to us.



There are two significant aspects in today’s gospel that can serve us well if we take them to heart. The first is the simple fact that of where the scene takes place: ***Jesus entered the house of Simon and Andrew.*** Our homes are not “second best” when it comes to seeking and finding Jesus. We’ve been so indoctrinated in thinking that a church building is the most important

sacred space in our lives that we've overlooked our homes as the sacred site where the work of God's kingdom begins and goes forward. The gospels are filled with scenarios of Jesus enjoying and encountering people in their homes – his first miracle at a wedding feast at a home in Cana; the synagogue leader's home which he enters to heal the man's daughter; his friend Mary's home in Bethany where she lovingly anoints him with oil; the tax collector Zacchaeus' home to which Jesus is invited after the man climbs down from the sycamore tree.

Holy things happen in the place we call "home." We might be frustrated at being stuck in our houses, quarantined for the past year, feeling restless and trapped. But Jesus does amazing work in spaces that we consider ordinary and mundane. What would it be like if we honor our homes as sacred places, as Jesus honored Simon's home? The second aspect we can take to heart from the gospel is the simple fact that "Jesus heals." There are always lingering questions and doubts about the miraculous cures recorded in the gospels. Did they really happen? If so, how? Mark tells us: ***He cured many who were sick.*** Notice, Jesus cured many, but not all. That's an important distinction to keep in mind. Being cured is not the same as being healed. All of Jesus' signs and wonders are meant to be signs of God's grace at work in our lives and in our world. A healing may or may not result in a cure.

Do you recall another healing story in the gospels? The story of the ten lepers whom Jesus cured of their disease? We're told that only one returned to give thanks. The other nine were off jumping for joy that they were cured. But perhaps only one was healed – the one who recognized God at work in Jesus; the one whose affliction was

removed and whose burden was lifted, but, more significantly, whose heart was changed and filled with love and gratitude.



The one who returned to give thanks was not only cured; he was also healed. You may not need a cure at this time, but we all need healing at any time – having our hearts changed and filled with love and gratitude. So, enjoy the Super Bowl this afternoon, if you decide to watch it at home, in your "sacred space." But, as you do, think of Laurent Duvernay-Tardif, who's also watching it instead of playing in it, because he made a critical decision to place his mission as a medical professional ahead of his athletic career so that he could be an instrument of hope and healing for others.

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And a word of encouragement and challenge to our parish teens who are at prayer with us this morning as they prepare for the Sacrament of Confirmation sometime this Spring. All of us in your community are grateful for and inspired by your decision and willingness to strengthen your Christian commitment as confirmed Catholics. Our future as a Church depends on your faith, your energy and your dedication. My prayer for you is that you won't let the challenges of your young life,



especially during this time of pandemic, get you down like Job was. I pray that you might channel the kind of passion that a Super Bowl player has for his game to your faith as a follower of Jesus. With your parents and your Confirmation sponsors as helpers and guides, you are planting the seeds of a strong faith that will accompany your life's journey and give you the grace to carry out your God-given mission in life.

***Holy Spirit,***

***you are the giver of many gifts  
which God wants to give each  
of these candidates very personally.***

***Open their hearts and my minds  
as they continue their time of formation.***

***Help them to know that you are confirming  
all the goodness that they are,  
and all the goodness  
that they will become.***

***Increase their desire to know  
and follow Jesus as his disciples  
with grateful and courageous hearts.***

***We ask this through Christ our Lord.***

***Let the church say: Amen!***

*John Kasper, OSFS*

