

Dear Friends,

If you've ever come in contact with a charity or other organization that works with people who are really down on their luck – people who are suffering from homelessness, unemployment, drug or alcoholic addictions – then you will have heard tales of how it's not just the experience of physical suffering that is so hard, but how troubled they have been, often feeling as if they have no hope left. But you often hear remarkable stories of transformation – of how those who have fallen by the wayside have been picked up by an organization and helped to have their lives turned around. Even more extraordinary are the stories of those who, with help, have not only rebuilt their lives and rediscovered hope, but have then volunteered to help others. It's like a reverse domino effect: once one is built up, others are too. A community is formed where once people felt isolated, worn down by life, and are now healed.

This account from Mark's Gospel is typical of many of the stories of Jesus' ministry. It is the Sabbath and Jesus has been to synagogue with James and John, and then went on to Simon and Andrew's house. They would have followed tradition by resting for the rest of the Sabbath, until they discover that there is someone in need – Simon's mother-in-law, who is sick. So Jesus puts scruples to one side and focuses on what matters and attends to the woman. She is only the first of many to call for his help that day. By sundown, the end of the Sabbath, practically the whole town is crowding into the house. When Simon's mother-in-law is cured of her fever, she doesn't relax or run to tell people all about it. It is her moment to wait on the others – to serve them just as Jesus had served her.

Mark's Gospel is very different. Even on a quiet Sabbath day, this world is teeming with people: Jesus and his apostles, Simon's mother-in-law, the crowds who flock to Simon's house. Jesus is at the center of a community. There is not any isolation. But it is Jesus who makes the difference, turning to each person who needs him.

Like those who follow him in Mark's Gospel, we too can have our lives transformed by Jesus. Conversion requires trust, though, and like those who came to Simon's house at the end of the Sabbath day, trusting that Jesus would cure them, so we must be ready to offer him our trust if we are to undergo our own conversion.

A cure of physical ailment may take a moment and last a lifetime, but conversion is not a one-off. Like a physical cure it is about one's life changing for good, but it also requires constant engagement. Conversion is a relationship, a mutual exchange between God and ourselves. God's love is there for us – but are we willing to reciprocate?

We glimpse an insight into what full engagement – like conversion – means from what happens to Simon's mother-in-law. Jesus overturns the Sabbath order to cure her of fever that day, and what he gives to her inspires her to in turn give to others as she waits on them. Conversion brings us to God, just as the encounter of Simon's mother-in-law with Jesus brought her to God. But sustaining our conversion needs prayer, just as Jesus also needed prayer. And that prayer will also help us to build our relationships with our communities. Converted to Jesus, ready to serve others, we will be able to cast aside our melancholy and our eyes will indeed see joy.

Your friend in Jesus
Msgr. Zach