

5th Sunday in Ordinary Time B (February 4, 2024 STM: 5:15, 7:30 BAA Sunday)

I have been fortunate enough to not have contracted COVID. Many of you here today have had it-some twice or even three times. After all of the effects of having COVID, one of the hardest parts is a sense of loneliness or isolation. People do not want to get sick so they stay away. Despite best efforts of family or caregivers, your world can become very small when you are sick. Your life can be limited to your room or your bed. And not a lot of people can understand how you feel, save those who have gone through the same thing. For some with prolonged illness, there can be some sense of despair and frustration.

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ Jesus, we get a sense of this despair and frustration in the first reading today from Job. Job, through no fault of his own, loses all that is sacred and precious to him. His health, his children, his money, all gone. His friends try to help him through it. He wants none of it. Job cries out his God. "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."

The book of Job ends with a happy resolution. We do not hear that today but we do hear in the psalm how God heals the brokenhearted / and binds up their wounds. / He tells the number of the stars; / he calls each by name." This is a reminder that there is hope beyond the challenges of life and that can be found in Christ.

We see in the gospel today how Jesus heals Simon's mother-in-law. She is gravely ill. Jesus goes to her, grasped her hand, and helped her up." In the original Greek of Mark's Gospel, the word that is translated here as "helped her up," is the same word that is used in Mark's account of the Resurrection. Mark is actually telling us that Jesus "raised" the woman up. This isn't just a story about a miraculous healing. Instead, Mark is making a direct association with the Resurrection of Jesus. The woman has been saved from the death and despair like Job and brought into a new form of life that is defined by her service to Jesus and the others. Even here, the word that Mark uses is that same word that is used when Jesus tells us, "The Son of Man came not to be served, but to *serve*." You see what Mark is doing here? He is pointing to the renewal of all creation that will come through the Paschal Mystery of Christ's suffering, death and resurrection.

death.

The invitation of today's liturgy is think, really think, about the times when we have experienced some kind of terrible suffering or sorrow. And that is most of us. I have been your pastor for close to 13 years and I have walked with many of you through those times. It could be illness, depression, addiction, loneliness or the death of a loved one. I know too that some are able to find grace in these times. Grace and new insights about life and love and God in sickness and suffering.

John Updike, in his poem "Fever" tells of one facet of inner healing that may accompany sickness.

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*I have brought back a good
Message from the land of 102 degrees:
God exists.
I had doubted it before;
But the bedposts spoke of it with utmost
Confidence...
....Yes, it is truth long known,
That some secrets are hidden from health.*

So, where have you been able to find hope in the midst of trial? Where have you found God's healing presence in your life? How does the example of Peter's mother-in-law provide an example for you of service and gratitude? We pray today for healing in body, mind or spirit, from the Divine Physician who comes to indeed heal the brokenhearted. Amen.
Portions adapted from Deacon Greg Kandra
BAA FOLLOWS