

SPIRITUALITY

Reflecting on the Gospel

In the gospel, God's remembrance of and compassion for suffering humanity comes most tangibly and radically in the healing presence of Jesus. From the religious service in the synagogue Jesus moves immediately into the house of Simon and Andrew, accompanied by James and John, disciples who are having a busy apprenticeship. In the healing of Simon's mother-in-law we have a

vignette of the mission of Jesus, the free man, who cares nothing for taboos that prohibited the touching of a woman not one's wife, and especially on the Sabbath. Jesus has healed the tormented man in the synagogue, and he will make no discrimination between male and female, even though to hold the hand of the sick woman could earn him the accusation of ritual uncleanness. Compassion has a more urgent hold on Jesus, and his raising of her is by the same power that God will manifest in raising Jesus from the dead. The response of Simon's mother-in-law to her healing is to *serve* (*diēkonei*, which the Lectionary translates as "she waited on them") Jesus and his companions. The last use of this word in Mark's gospel is in Mark 15:41, and here it is again with reference to women who followed and served him, so framing the mission of Jesus from its beginning to his death with the service of women. It is a reminder, too, that all who have experienced

the healing power of Jesus, in the flesh and in the Spirit, should respond with service of others.

Even though Jesus did not subject himself to Sabbath restraints, the crowds wait until "after sunset" when the Sabbath was over to bring those who are sick in body and mind to him. Jesus responds to the universal longing for wholeness and healing, vanquishing the reign of evil, yet commanding the evil spirits not to speak of him because not until his death will his true messianic identity be revealed. Before that, such a revelation, especially by the proclamation of the formerly possessed, could be manipulated by Jesus's enemies into false charges of his being on the side of the kingdom of evil (see Mark 3:22-27).

The one to whom Jesus is first accountable, however, is not the sick or possessed person, not Simon or his companions. Jesus's life is above all directed to God who is acting in him and through him, so early the next morning he seeks a place where he can be alone with God in prayer. Simon and some of his companions are described not as Jesus's "followers," but as those who "pursue" Jesus. There is a note of accusation and misunderstanding in Simon's words: "Everyone is looking for you" (including us!). There is no appreciation of Jesus's own need to search for his God in prayer. What Jesus has heard in his prayer is the call to proclaim the reigning presence of God in other towns, to move on from the enthusiastic reception of yesterday, because that is why he came. How often are we tempted to stay with the "yesterdays" of success and acclamation and hesitate to go forward to the largely unknown "tomorrows" to which God is calling us? And how important is prayer in our discernment of God's call?



GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Matt 8:17

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Christ took away our infirmities
and bore our diseases.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Mark 1:29-39; L74B

On leaving the synagogue

Jesus entered the house of
Simon and Andrew with
James and John.

Simon's mother-in-law lay sick
with a fever.

They immediately told him
about her.

He approached, grasped her
hand, and helped her up.

Then the fever left her and she
waited on them.

When it was evening, after
sunset,

they brought to him all who
were ill or possessed by demons.

The whole town was gathered at the
door.

He cured many who were sick with
various diseases,
and he drove out many demons,
not permitting them to speak because
they knew him.

Rising very early before dawn, he left
and went off to a deserted place,
where he prayed.

Simon and those who were with him
pursued him
and on finding him said, "Everyone is
looking for you."

He told them, "Let us go on to the
nearby villages
that I may preach there also.

For this purpose have I come."

So he went into their synagogues,
preaching and driving out demons
throughout the whole of Galilee.

Focusing the Gospel

Key words and phrases: He approached, grasped her hand, and helped her up.

To the point: Jesus's day in Capernaum is punctuated by healings. Last week we read in the gospel of how, while at synagogue, he frees a man from an unclean spirit by rebuking the spirit, saying, "Quiet! Come out of him!" Immediately after leaving the synagogue, Jesus encounters another person who is ailing, this time from an illness of the body rather than the spirit. Whereas before Jesus had used the power of his words to command the unclean spirit, now Jesus draws physically near to Simon's mother-in-law, takes her hand, and helps her from her sickbed. In both instances Jesus's presence restores health and wellness. Word of these healings spreads quickly and by nightfall "the whole town" is pressing in upon Jesus's door, eager to be near the one who has the ability to make the broken whole.

Connecting the Gospel

to the first reading: The first reading from Job gives us the words of one who is suffering acutely. Job's plight is well-known: having lost his children, servants, and livestock, he is then struck with "severe boils from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head" (Job 2:7; NABRE). Most of the book of Job's forty-two chapters consist of a dialogue between Job and three friends who come to comfort and counsel him. Today's reading is Job's response to his friend Eliphaz's suggestion that Job continue to trust in God's mercy.

to experience: While Job's despairing words seem to deny all hope, they are a true rendering of the pain that can overtake human life when unthinkable tragedy strikes. We can affirm the presence of suffering and evil in our world, but at the same time also proclaim the presence of Jesus, who desires to be with us in illness and sorrow, and to restore us to complete joy and fullness of life.

Connecting the Responsorial Psalm

to the readings: Today's psalm references God's mighty acts of mercy and compassion in returning the people of Israel to their land after the Babylonian exile. After seeing their country ravaged and the temple destroyed, it would not be an overstatement to say the people's hearts had been collectively broken as they were taken away into exile as the spoils of conquest. Much like the story of Job, it seems like this is the worst that a country or an individual could face. And yet, the psalmist stresses that the people are not alone. Though the temple—the particular place of encounter with God—is no more, their God accompanies them into exile, tends to their broken hearts, and finally leads them home again.

to psalmist preparation: How have you experienced God as a healer to the brokenhearted?

PROMPTS FOR FAITH-SHARING

In the first reading Job laments, "My days . . . come to an end without hope." Have you ever found yourself in a similar position of despair? What sustained you?

Today's responsorial psalm calls us to "[p]raise the Lord, who heals the brokenhearted." How has God's healing action tended your own heart through life's struggles and sorrows?

St. Paul writes to the Corinthians of all that he does "for the sake of the gospel." How do you proclaim the gospel in word and deed?

Jesus rises early and goes off "to a deserted place" to pray. Where and when do you find silence and solitude to be with God?