

SPIRITUALITY

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 be-
cause 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.

Reflecting on the Gospel

Sometimes when children are excited and tell stories of their latest adventures, they can skip over details, jumping from one tale to the next. "And then" is a common conjunction joining these hurried sentences that quickly moves the narrative forward, often in fits and starts. The excitement definitely carries the story. The listener (maybe even a parent!) is often left wondering exactly what happened. There are a number of questions left unanswered, but one thing is clear: "This was exciting!"

Something similar is happening in the first chapter of Mark, indeed some would say it happens throughout the entire Gospel of Mark!

We see this excitement and hurried storytelling on prominent display in today's reading. Though we have only a few verses, there are at least three distinct vignettes.

The action begins in Capernaum, where Jesus has been preaching in the synagogue. He and his new disciples (for they were called by Jesus only a few verses earlier) go to the house of the brothers Simon and Andrew. There Simon's mother-in-law is healed. Too many bad jokes have already been told about healing Simon's "mother-in-law," and the preacher is advised against adding to the list. Still, a few things are clear: Simon (Peter) had a wife; and the extended family, including at least his brother and his mother-

in-law, lived under the same roof. This is family togetherness that many middle class people in the United States may no longer experience.

This particular home must have been a welcoming place. Not only was it the location of such an extended family, but James and John were also with them that day. And by evening it seemed the entire town was at the door! Jesus cured many of the townspeople before leaving early the next day.

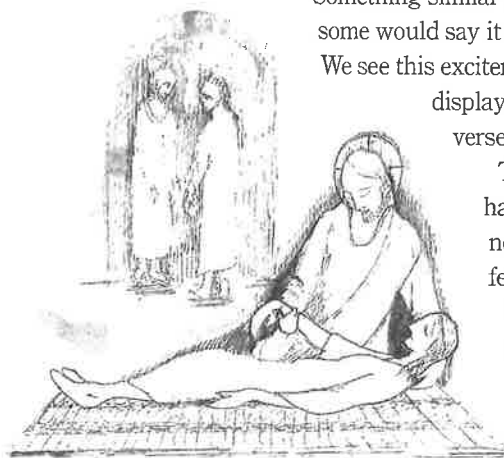
Though Capernaum formed something of a base for his Galilean ministry, Jesus still needed to get away from time to time as the last short story in today's reading reminds us. But even a few moments of solitude were nearly beyond reach as Jesus tells his disciples that he came for one purpose: to preach.

The action and excitement covered in this brief period is palpable. In one sense it covers only twenty-four hours before concluding with a sentence that says he went throughout the whole of Galilee preaching and driving out demons. Jesus has a purpose and his followers are witness to it. It's as though there is no time to spare, not even a predawn moment to himself, for that is filled with prayer.

Excitement fills the air with the wonders Jesus does.

Living the Paschal Mystery

At times our busied lives can seem frenetic, simply moving from one activity to the next with barely a moment in between. We imagine "the good old days" when things weren't so harried. It's true that technology has perhaps increased our attention (or lack thereof) to many details, but time marches along at the same pace it always has for us. Years, months, days, and even hours and minutes may seem to move more quickly than before, but in reality it's been moving at a constant pace for many centuries. Most of us feel the pressure of time because we are driven by a purpose. There are things we need to do. And today we hear of Jesus driven by the same. He has something to accomplish. He has a purpose. Though he wakes before dawn to have some time to himself, even that sacred



moment quickly vanishes in the midst of the day's activities. Simply being busy or having things to accomplish is not a bad thing. In fact, it can be the opposite. Today we have a chance to reflect on what motivates us. For what purpose are we driven? Are we taking time to pray, brief as it may be? Even when we do find a moment of solitude, the needs of others come before our own needs.

Focusing the Gospel

Mark 1:29-39

Today's gospel is the second of three miracles in the first chapter of Mark's gospel: the casting out of the unclean spirit (last Sunday's gospel), the curing of Peter's mother-in-law (today's gospel), and the cleansing of the leper (next Sunday's gospel). Of note in today's gospel is the Greek word that Mark uses to describe the woman's cure. The Lectionary text reads that Jesus "helped her up"—but a more accurate translation of the Greek is Jesus "raised her up." Mark will use the same word to describe Jesus' resurrection. The English text then reads that Simon's mother-in-law "waited" on them, but the Greek is more accurately rendered as she "served" them. The life of the Risen One, who comes "not to be served but to serve," is one of compassionate and selfless giving and service to others. Throughout his gospel, Mark portrays Jesus as somewhat uncomfortable with his growing renown as a miracle worker. He clearly values time away from the crowds to be alone to pray—even though that time is cut short by the needs of those around him.

Jesus works miracles not out of any need of his own for the adulation of the masses but out of an extraordinary sense of compassion and love for those who come to him in crisis or pain. The miracles he works are not to solicit acclaim for himself but to awaken faith and trust in the word of God, to restore in humankind God's vision of a world united as brothers and sisters under his providence ("For this purpose have I come"). Jesus' compassion for those who come to him breaks down stereotypes and defenses that divide, segregate, and marginalize people; his ministry is not to restore bodies to health but to restore spirits to wholeness.

Focusing the First Reading

Job 7:1-4, 6-7

The brokenness and despair, the alienation of estrangement from God that is the lot of many souls is movingly portrayed in this brief reflection by Job. The Jesus of the gospel enters such broken and defeated lives to restore them to hope and meaning.

Focusing the Responsorial Psalm

Ps 147:1-2, 3-4, 5-6

The first third of Psalm 147, today's responsorial, is a hymn of praise to the God who heals those broken in body or spirit, the God who brings home the scattered and exiled, the God who lifts up the poor and powerless.

Focusing the Second Reading

1 Cor 9:16-19, 22-23

In a sophisticated metropolitan city like Corinth, freedom of thought and the exercise of one's rights were highly valued; to surrender one's freedom was considered anathema to the citizens of Corinth. But, in today's excerpt from his First Letter to the Corinthians, Paul writes that he places his freedom at the service of others, as did Christ: we are to make oneself "weak" for the sake of the "weak," to become a "slave" to others for the sake of the Gospel.

PROMPTS FOR HOMILISTS, CATECHISTS, AND RCIA TEAMS

Have you known someone who, despite the pain and trauma he or she has endured, still manages to live a life of purpose and joy?

Is there a "demon" that you struggle to "cast out" of your life?

In what realistic and authentic ways can and should the Gospel influence such public arenas as politics, business, education, sports, and family life?

How would you respond to Job's lament in today's first reading?

Do you have a "deserted place" in your life where or when you are alone with God?