

February 4, 2024
5th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Mark 1:29-39

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.

Background:

Last Sunday, the Gospel described Jesus' arrival in Capernaum and him going to the synagogue on the Sabbath. Jesus took his turn to teach, and also cast an unclean spirit out of a man. Twice, those present remarked in amazement that Jesus was teaching with a new kind of authority (Mark 1:27). The text for last week ended, "His fame spread everywhere throughout the whole region of Galilee." (Mark 1:28)

The text for this week follows immediately after last week's Gospel and records four events. The events are told with sparse detail: Jesus cures Simon's mother-in-law, Jesus cures those who are brought to him from the town that evening, he seeks out a place of solitude to pray, and finally he speaks with Simon about the priorities of his mission.

After Jesus leaves the synagogue, which suggests that it is still the Sabbath, he enters the house of Simon. They immediately tell Jesus about Simon's mother-in-law, and he goes to her, touches her, and restores her to health. In their understanding, illness was associated with the power that death had over a person. The word used to describe the healing is "ederiro" which means "raised up," an expression that is typically used in accounts of the resurrection. Peter's mother-in-law then begins to wait on them. The word here is "diagoneo" which is not the word that would describe the typical service roles of women of the day. Rather, the term denotes "service within the community." As Jesus did in last week's Gospel, he demonstrates his power over an evil that threatens life. Peter's mother-in-law is freed to minister to the community.

In the second scenario, Mark describes how Jesus' reputation has spread throughout the area and now people are bringing the sick to him. The crowds wait until after the sun has set when the Sabbath has ended. Jesus continues to act like a folk healer of the day who is willing to risk engaging the sickness and evil spirits that are afflicting people.

In a single verse Mark describes Jesus intentionally withdrawing from others to be able to pray. The verb here carries the connotation that his intention is for an "extended time away."

In the final verses, Simon and the others go looking for Jesus. Their statement, "everyone is looking for you," suggests that they think he should return to those who are seeking him. Jesus responds by saying he intends to go to other villages to preach. The text ends with a statement summing up Jesus' ministry in the area as preaching and driving out demons.

Last week the Gospel brought to light a contrast between the evil spirits, who knew who Jesus was, and the crowd and disciples who were all left asking, "What is this?" (Mark 1: 27) This week, the contrast is between the disciples, who think they know Jesus and his mission, and Jesus, who knows that he must get away from that crowd in order to pray and then move on to other villages and minister to those who need to hear his message.

Reflection Questions:

1. How has the pandemic affected your daily life? How does it affect your willingness to be around the sick and those who might be contagious?
2. Are you able to recall incidences from the Gospels that help you become aware of how the people of Jesus' day dealt with people who were contagious?
3. Reflecting on today's Gospel, what are some of the values that seem to matter the most to Jesus, Peter's mother-in-law, the neighbors, and the disciples?
4. What do you think might have been some of the things that Jesus brought to prayer that morning?
5. What do you think the disciples thought when Jesus told them in so many words that he was not going back to Capernaum but going to other villages and towns?
6. Has God ever surprised or disappointed you by how God seemed to be responding to you?
7. Do you know people who felt like they needed to abandon some successful aspect of their life in order to do what they felt God was calling them to do?
8. Jesus seems to have walked away from curing people who were coming to him back in Capernaum, in order to preach to others. Have you ever felt like God had walked away from you and your needs?
9. Can you take some time to talk with God about whatever arose in you as you reflected on this section of the Gospel?

The Gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to fr.paul.gallagher.ofm@gmail.com.

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fsc-calledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

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Excerpts from the readings for February 4, 2024, the Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Job spoke, saying: Is not man's life on earth a drudgery? Are not his days those of hirelings?
He is a slave who longs for the shade, a hireling who waits for his wages.
So 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.
Remember that my life is like the wind; I shall not see happiness again.

Praise the Lord, who heals the brokenhearted. Praise the Lord, for he is good;

*sing praise to our God, for he is gracious; it is fitting to praise him.
The Lord rebuilds Jerusalem; the dispersed of Israel he gathers.
He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.
He tells the number of the stars; he calls each by name.
Great is our Lord and mighty in power; to his wisdom there is no limit.
The Lord sustains the lowly; the wicked he casts to the ground.*

Brothers and sisters: If I preach the Gospel, this is no reason for me to boast, for an obligation has been imposed on me, and woe to me if I do not preach it! If I do so willingly, I have a recompense, but if unwillingly, then I have been entrusted with a stewardship. What then is my recompense? That, when I preach, I offer the Gospel free of charge so as not to make full use of my right in the Gospel. Although I am free in regard to all, I have made myself a slave to all so as to win over as many as possible. To the weak I became weak, to win over the weak. I have become all things to all, to save at least some. All this I do for the sake of the Gospel, so that I too may have a share in it.

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 to 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.

Excerpts from Job 7:1-4, 6-7; Psalm 147:1-6; 1 Corinthians 9:16-19, 22-23; and Mark 1:29-39

Friends,

Here are the gospel background and reflection questions for February 4th, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. The gospel, again from early in Mark's gospel, tells of Jesus healing Simon's mother-in-law who is sick with a fever. This leads to all the ill in the town being gathered at the door in the evening. Jesus heals the sick and drives out demons from those who are possessed. The next day, before dawn, Jesus goes to a deserted place to pray. When the disciples find him, they tell him, "Everyone is looking for you." Jesus replies, "Let us go on to the nearby villages that I may preach there also. For this purpose have I come." And he went preaching and driving out demons throughout Galilee.

The other readings also have references to carrying out obligations, and healing power sustaining those in need of it. In the first reading Job says, "The night drags on; I am restless until the dawn. My days come to an end without hope. My life is like the wind. Is not man's life on earth a drudgery?" Psalm 147 exclaims, "Praise the Lord, who heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds," and adds, "Great is our Lord who sustains the lowly." In the second reading, from the first letter to the Corinthians, Paul writes, "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel. I have made myself a slave so as to win over as many as possible, so that I too may have a share in it."

Much like last week's gospel, as we continue to follow the story of the early part of Jesus' ministry, this gospel demonstrates to Jesus' first disciples, and to the people of the region, the power and the authority of this Jesus who was a newcomer to their lives. They were being introduced to him for the first time. They didn't have the benefit that we do of supporting information in the readings from before his time, and after. "Everyone is looking for you," they say. He responds, "For this purpose have I come."

> i < May the Word light your way each day!

I am filled with restlessness until the dawn.
Job 7:4