

February 4, 2018
5th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Mark 1:29-39

On leaving the synagogue he [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 on the Sabbath going to the synagogue. On that Sabbath Jesus took his turn to teach, and cast an unclean spirit out of a man. Those who witnessed the event were amazed and remarked that Jesus was teaching with a new kind of authority. (Luke 1:27) The text for last week ended, "His fame spread everywhere throughout the whole region of Galilee." (Luke 1:28)

The text for this week follows immediately after last week's Gospel, and it is composed of four events. Like last week, 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, Jesus seeks out a place of solitude to pray, and finally Jesus 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 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. She then begins to wait on them, and 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 he did in last week's gospel, Jesus 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 the result of the spread of Jesus' reputation throughout the area. The crowds wait until after the sun has set and the Sabbath has ended. Travel is now permitted, and they come with the sick to be cured.

Jesus needs to find a place of solitude in order to pray. The verb carries the connotation that his intention is an "extended time away." Simon and the others go looking for him, and their statement, "everyone is looking for you," (verse 37) 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 (verse 39).

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 that Jesus should respond to crowd who have come seeking him, 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. What is your typical reaction to people who are sick and contagious?
2. How does being sick and unable to do your normal routine affect you?
3. Using this text, what are some of the values that seem to matter the most to Jesus? What are some of the things that Jesus does not seem to be concerned with?
4. What are some of things Jesus might have talked with His Father about during his prayer that morning?
5. How do you think Simon and the others felt when Jesus rejected their suggestion that they return to those who were looking for him?
6. Have you ever felt like you needed to abandon something that you were successful at in order to do what you felt God was calling you to do?
7. 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?
8. Can you take some time to talk to God about your desire to live as God's disciple and the struggles or questions that you have in doing that, or some other thought or feeling that arose within you as you read this text?

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 annemarie.lom@gmail.com

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