

A Bible Bullet (aimed at the heart)

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B
Job 7:1-4,6-7; 1Cor. 9:16-19,22-23; Mark 1:29-39

Recently we heard a reading from the Book of Jonah. That book and the Book of Job, from which we read this coming Sunday, are both contained in the section of the Bible for works of prose. These are fictional stories told with a lesson to be learned. Think about it. That is Good News. Jonah and Job faced difficult times.

Although Job is only a fictional figure whose experiences try his faith, Job stands as an example to all of mankind who, in the face of trials, desire to understand a loving God. Job wants to understand why God would permit trials of a man who had been faithful. At the end of his years of hardships and losses, Job says to the Lord:

I have dealt with great things that I do not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I cannot know. I had heard of you by word of mouth but now my eye has seen you. Therefore I disown what I have said, and repent in dust and ashes.

I recall a book from years back entitled When Bad Things Happen To Good People by Rabbi Harold Kushner. Rabbi Kushner commented about how frequently faithful believers would approach him and say, "I don't understand how God can let this happen." He would reply, "What's to understand?" He was not being flippant or unfeeling. His years of service to the Lord and to his fellow man had removed from him the need to explain God. After all, God is God.

Human beings have always desired to understand the ways of God. We would like to understand the trials of today also.

In Mark's Gospel this week we find Jesus near the beginning of his public ministry. He has just come from the synagogue where he cast out a demon from a man and silenced the demon from revealing who Jesus really is. The crowds are amazed, not just at the exorcism, but also at the authority with which Jesus speaks.

As Jesus leaves the synagogue, he enters the house of Simon and Andrew. Simon's mother-in-law is ill with a fever. "Burning fevers" are mentioned in the Talmud. This was and still is a common experience in Galilee. It was so common that the Talmud even had a prescribed method for curing the fever. A knife made completely of iron was tied to a thorn bush by a braid of hair. Then

over a series of a few days, Exodus 3:2-5 was read and a certain magical formula was followed. A cure was to result. Jesus comes along in this episode and disregards the cultural superstitions of the time and heals the woman through His power and authority.

In the original Greek, Mark uses the word “egeiro” for “raised her up”. The word is often found in early Church writings when referring to the resurrection of Jesus. Some scholars believe that this is a foreshadowing of the resurrection of all mankind through Jesus’ death and resurrection. And when we have been saved through Jesus the only possible response that is appropriate is to serve others as He served. Therefore, the mother-in-law rises and begins to serve those present.

As v.32 begins we find that it is night and people are bringing the ill and possessed to Jesus for healing. We must remember that the Sabbath lasts from 6:00 pm (or sundown, or when three stars become visible in the night sky) on Friday until 6:00 pm on Saturday. From previous verses we know that Jesus entered the synagogue on the Sabbath and then went directly to Simon’s house. The law would not have permitted the Jews to do any labor on the Sabbath. Carrying a sick person to Jesus would have been labor. Therefore, they had to wait until dark because then the Sabbath would have ended. Also, it is at that time that Jesus could have walked a distance, lawfully, to reach a quiet place to pray.

The people who follow Jesus looking for cures do not understand how He cures, only that He speaks with authority and does indeed cure. Are they followers then? Probably not. Most would be using Jesus for what he could do for them and their loved ones.

But Jesus does not want a “dog and pony show” kind of ministry. He heals without magic and wants to be believed. Remember, at this point in this Gospel, only Satan knows who Jesus is and Jesus prevents that disclosure.

Strengthen us, O Lord, as we deal with things we do not understand and cannot know!