

5th Sunday in Ordinary Time, February 7th 2021, Year B

“St. Michael, the Archangel, defend us in the day of Battle; be our safeguard against the wickedness and snares of the Devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray, and do thou, O prince of the Heavenly Host, by the power of God, cast into Hell, Satan and all the other evil spirits who prowl through the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.” This powerful prayer of exorcism was composed by Pope Leo XIII.

Job 7:1-4, 6-7

This dramatic poem by an unknown author was probably written after the Babylonian Exile in the 7th--5th century before Christ. It deals with the suffering of the innocent. It is a marvel of misery, oozing with pain, anxiety and depression but today's gospel will balance this lament with images of healing and hope.

Job spoke saying:

1Is not man's life on earth a drudgery? Are not his days those of hirelings? Drudgery refers to wretched states in life like forced military service or day labor. A hireling has no guarantee of future work.

2He is a slave who longs for the shade, a hireling who waits for his wages. A slave longs to get out of the hot sun and to find some shade. Both verses 1 and 2 are general, they apply to all people.

3So I have been assigned months of misery, and troubled nights have been allotted to me. The writing now gets personal.

4If in bed I say, “When shall I arise?” then the night drags on; I am filled with restlessness until the dawn.

6My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle; they come to an end without hope. The weaver's shuttle is a monotonous movement and when the shuttle runs out of thread, Job's life will come to an end.

7Remember that my life is like the wind, I shall not see happiness again. The wind moves aimlessly and then passes, to be seen no more.

1 Corinthians 9:16-19, 22-23

Paul established the Church in Corinth in 50 A.D. and wrote this about 56 A.D. Historians have put Paul high on the list of the 100 most significant people in history. Even after the coming of Christ, life is still a valley of tears and there are still hardships to be faced. In fact, St. Paul's hardships were probably increased by his commission to preach the Gospel. Had he remained a Jewish rabbi, he may well have succeeded his famous teacher Gamaliel and had comfort, prestige and a place among the great ones of his people. Instead he makes himself “the slave of all so as to win over as many as possible” to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Brothers and sisters:

16If 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! What does God call you to do whether you want to or not?

17If I do so willingly, I have a recompense, but if unwillingly, then I have been entrusted with a stewardship. “recompense” means reward or payment. Paul's motive and energy stem from something very different from mere human generosity: it stems from his faith in divine generosity and the sheer goodness of God! The historical situation here is that Paul refused the stipend he could have rightfully accepted from the Corinthians because he wanted to make the parallel point that the good news is freely given by God. This wise decision placed Paul at an advantage over his opponents as it lent him, and his message, credibility. “stewardship” means “commission” which he is obliged to fulfill.

18What 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. One whose life is dedicated to preaching the gospel has the right to a stipend, something to live on. CCC 2122 says that, “the minister should ask nothing for the administration of the sacraments beyond the offerings defined by the competent authority, always being careful that the needy are not deprived of the help of the sacraments because of their poverty. The competent authority determines these offerings in accordance with the principle that the Christian people ought to contribute to the support of the Church’s ministers. The laborer deserves his food.”

19Although I am free in regard to all, I have made myself a slave to all so as to win over as many as possible. By making himself “a slave to all,” Paul means that he has chosen the slavery of willing service.

22To the weak I became weak, to win over the weak. I have become all things to all, to save at least some. CCC 24: Whoever teaches must become all things to all men to win everyone to Christ. Above all, teachers must not imagine that a single kind of soul has been entrusted to them, and that consequently they can teach and form equally all the faithful in true piety with one and the same method! Let them realize that some are in Christ as newborn babes, others as adolescents, and still others as adults in full command of their powers. Those who are called to the ministry of preaching must suit their words to the maturity and understanding of their hearers, as they hand on the teaching of the mysteries of faith and the rules of moral conduct. This is a reference to the previous chapter, in which Paul addressed a controversy about meat offered to idols. Though it is legitimate for Christians to eat such meat because they recognize that idols do not even exist, Paul says he would not eat it if doing so would scandalize “the weak,” those who did not understand and regarded the eating of such meat as worship of idols. So Paul says he became weak himself, i.e., he limited his freedom for their sake. There is a sadness in this last expression that suggests the many sacrifices and efforts of the Apostle that had not produced visible results, or his preaching that seemed to fall on deaf ears for not all chose salvation.

23All this I do for the sake of the gospel, so that I too may have a share in it. Paul carries on for one reason: the hope of having a share in the blessings of the gospel.

Mark 1: 20-39

29On leaving the synagogue Jesus entered the house of Simon and Andrew with James and John. After the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. and of the dispersion of the Jews outside of Palestine, the synagogue came into being. It is a Jewish place of assembly for prayer and instruction. It was not like the temple where God dwelt. No sacrifices were offered there. If a priest were present, except for certain courtesies, he was not distinguished from the other people present. There was only one temple but every town of any size had a synagogue. In Capernaum, where this story takes place, the synagogue was about a parking lot away from the home of Simon Peter, which became the headquarters for Jesus. Whenever he was there, the evangelists spoke of his being “at home.” Andrew was apparently not married and lived with Peter and Perpetua and her mother. (Just a note of reflection on these two remarkably hospitable women whose home became a hotel, an auditorium, and a hospital, visited by people with all sorts of diseases and demons.) There is an old adage that the Church of Christ can be found wherever Peter is.

30Simon’s mother-in-law lay sick with a fever. They immediately told him about her. The bones of Peter were studied at the Vatican in 1968 and they tell us that he was a stocky, muscular man about

5 feet 4 inches tall. Most early representations of him show a fair complexion, curly hair, and a short, curly beard. He was about the same age as Jesus and died in 67 A.D. We know very little about his wife except that some early Church Fathers asserted that her name was Perpetua. We do not know how many children they had but there is evidence of a daughter, Petronilla, who was born after the Resurrection of Christ and was permanently crippled by sickness at the age of ten.

31He approached, grasped her hand, and helped her up. Then the fever left her and she waited on them. When the fever left her she waited on them, which shows that the healing was complete. It also gives the example for those who are healed to serve others. The word for “helped her up” is also used in James 5:14-15 describing the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick: “Call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord WILL RAISE HIM UP; and if he has committed sins he will be forgiven.”

32When it was evening, after sunset, they brought to him all who were ill or possessed by demons. The people had waited until it was evening, after sunset on the Sabbath, to bring the sick and demon-possessed to Jesus, because it was laborious and thus unlawful before the Sabbath day ended. Exorcisms continue today, in the name of Jesus Christ, and succeed.

33The whole town was gathered at the door.

34He cured many who were sick with various diseases, and he drove out many demons, not permitting them to speak because they knew him. The miracles are evidence that salvation (which means healing) comes from Jesus. The evil spirits are not permitted to acknowledge Jesus as the Holy One of God. The danger would be that Jesus would be recognized merely as a miracle worker or conquering Messiah. Mark keeps the true purpose of Jesus a secret until the disciples are capable of understanding for the scandal of the cross would be too much for them to bear at this point. An additional consideration is that Jesus did not want the support or recognition of the Father of Lies.

35Rising very early before dawn, he left and went off to a deserted place, where he prayed. Jesus prayed early on this Sunday morning following the Sabbath. His practice anticipates the liturgical prayer of the Church on the first day of the week. Jesus also practices what he preaches on the propriety of solitary prayer. CCC 2602 points out that the words and works that Jesus does are the visible sign of his prayer done in secret.

36Simon and those who were with him pursued him

37and on finding him said, “Everyone is looking for you.”

38He told them, “Let us go on to the nearby villages that I may preach there also. For this purpose have I come.”

39So he went into their synagogues, preaching and driving out demons throughout the whole of Galilee. The deeds of expelling demons bore witness to the good news that Jesus preached. The first authority that Jesus gave his apostles was the power to expel demons (Mt. 10:1). Consider that 1/3 of the angels followed Satan in rebellion against God (Rev.). To deny Satan is to deny sin. All the demons were created good by God. They became evil through their own fault. Pope John Paul II has been so clear on the subject of Satan: “The battle against the devil, which is the principal task of St. Michael the Archangel, is still being fought today, because the devil is still alive and active in the world. The evil that surrounds us today, the disorders that plague our society, man’s inconsistency and brokenness are not only the results of Original Sin, but also the result of Satan’s pervasive and dark action.”

Some of the material for this commentary is from: "The Twelve The Lives of the Apostles After Calvary" by C. Bernard Ruffin, "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Mark," The Commentary Notes of Tim Grey, "Workbook For Lectors and Gospel Readers: 2005" by Aelred R. Rosser, Workbook For Lectors and Gospel Readers: 1997" by Lawrence E. Mick, "The Jerome Biblical Commentary," and "An Exorcist Tells His Story," by Gabriele Amorth.

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.