

## **Fifth Sunday of Ordinary Time**

Job's Lament

February 04, 2018

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The first reading from the book of Job is a bitter, melancholy cry of the heart. Why do we need to hear this? It sounds more like demonic despair than sacred saving word.

It Begins:

Is not man's life on earth a drudgery?

And it Ends:

I shall not see happiness again.

The saving word in this lament lies in its being heard at all; even this, even such a plaintive, despairing cry in the wilderness as this is heard by God. And it is being heard by God's people, not dismissed and forgotten, as Job himself feels here, but recorded and preserved in his people's collection of sacred texts. And it is heard by us, here and now, thousands of miles away, thousands of years later. The saving word in this lament lies in its being heard.

Hearing such a word as God's word gives needed comfort to any of us who can resonate with such lamentation at one time or another in our lives; it gives comfort to any of us who have given voice to a similar cry of despair of ever finding a hearing, of ever finding anyone else who could possibly know what we are feeling, who could ever have experienced such a pitch of grief, such sadness, such fear, such pain as we feel at such a time. This reading is testimony that such cries are not as lonely as we feel when we give voice to them. This reading is testimony that even such cries of despair are revelations of the divine in our midst.

But where is the divine in this? It lies in its expression of our need for God, that we cannot take care of ourselves, by ourselves, as much as we might like to, as much as we might think we ought to. Such words

remind us, that there are times in our lives when we cannot rely on ourselves alone. Such words remind us that we had better not try to go it alone.

Ever since my own struggles with depression I have been struck how in the Apostles Creed we profess that Jesus Christ not only was crucified, died and was buried, but that he descended even into hell itself. And I cannot tell you for how many funerals, loved ones of the deceased have chosen as their New Testament second reading, Paul's words that nothing can separate us from the love of God, neither height nor depth, nothing present, nor anything that is to come, not even death itself can separate us from the love of God.

Our responsorial psalm draws our attention to this same message "Praise the Lord who heals the broken-hearted." When our hearts resonate with Job's lament we must follow our own cry with the same refrain—"Praise the Lord who heals the broken-hearted." In our moment of misery we are blinded by our sorrow, but by repeating what we believe, even when we cannot see, we open our hands and our hearts to the healing that God is longing to give. "Praise the Lord who heals the broken-hearted."

Mark's Gospel shows how Jesus came with healing on his mind. Today we hear about the evening of his first day on the job. Jesus is the paradigm of a man on a mission. In the morning he calls his first disciples, then he goes and teaches in the synagogue, then he exorcizes a demon, then he cures Peter's mother-in-law, and now finally at sunset, the whole town crowds around him and he heals all who come to him, curing and exorcizing and healing long into the night. In the musical Jesus Christ Superstar the crush of the crowds come to be too much— He cries out, "Too many of you, too little of me" Finally he explodes "Heal yourselves!"

That is what one would expect from a merely human Jesus. But in the Gospels Jesus is not merely human. In the Gospel Jesus never turns them away. Early the next morning, Jesus does slip into the wilderness to get some time by himself with his Father. But soon his disciples are searching for him. "Everyone is looking for you!" And so

he moves on to the neighboring towns to do it all over again.

God hears the prayer of the broken hearted. God hears and responds not only with a word, but with himself, in the flesh, Jesus Christ. May we awaken to Christ's healing presence here and now as we gather. And filled with his Spirit may we become his hands and his feet for those crying Job's lament in our own day.