

5th Sunday
2/7/2021

PRAYER AND MISSION

We are in the midst of a pandemic. One common COVID symptom is a fever. Now a fever drains you of all your energy and drastically alters your outlook. You can feel on top of the world, but if your body temperature goes up three degrees, everything can change. Sometimes we forget how bad that is until it happens again.

What Job experienced was much more than a fever. He lost his children, property and health...short days, long nights and the loss of his hope. His cry is a poignant one from someone suffering in so many different ways. Perhaps that is part of what Peter's mother-in-law felt as she lay sick with a fever. Just as Job ultimately found relief from, so would she. Jesus grasped her hand and helped her up...*he raised her up*. That can be a phrase pregnant with meaning. Raising her up can be seen as an indication that one day he will be raised up. Once raised up, this woman serves them. This shows that her healing was complete and immediate, while at the same time her response is one of gratitude. That evening, many people gathered at the house and Jesus continued to heal others and drive out demons.

The next day Jesus rises early and prays alone. He is found and told that everyone is looking for him but Jesus is ready to move on to other villages. Jesus remains focused on his prayer and his mission.

So what does all this have to do with us? In baptism, Jesus has raises us up, sharing in his death and resurrection, his Paschal Mystery. A response of gratitude is to serve him, and so often this means serving him in others. This involves continuing his healing presence in one way or another. We each have our own mission in life: As a disciple, in our state in life and in our own unique way, to be who God calls us to be. And there can be distractions to the mission of who we are and what we are to be about. Two of these are failure and success. Jesus would know both. At Capernaum, he was a great hit and it would have been easy to stay there but Jesus knew his mission. Elsewhere, a Samaritan town would not receive him but Jesus continued his mission. This reminds us of the importance of prayer because prayer, among other things, can reinforce us in our mission.

So often we think of prayer as something complicated and abstract when in fact prayer is both simple and practical. Prayer is simple, it involves lifting our hearts and our minds to God. It is grounding ourselves in God's love. Not only is prayer something simple, it's something practical. We can get more done when we pray. Exercise is like prayer, we get more done when we do it. Over the centuries, prayer has sometimes been called spiritual exercises and like physical exercise, prayer allows us to do more.

Moreover, authentic prayer always corresponds with our state in life. It helps us to become better spouses, parents, workers or whatever. The prayer life of a cloistered nun won't be that of a mother with young children, and the prayer life of a bishop will be different from that of a single man but we're all called to a life of daily prayer, in harmony with our state of life. Not only that, just as we're all different, so too the prayer life of each person will be different.

Lent will soon be here, a time when we devote ourselves to prayer, fasting and almsgiving and as I often do, I take this time to offer what I call the fifteen minute challenge. This Lent, just commit yourself to fifteen minutes of personal prayer every day ideally at the same time every day. Morning might be a good time of day for this, as it was for Jesus, or perhaps another time would work better for you. Simply commit to fifteen minutes of daily prayer whether it be quietly reciting some prayers, praying the Rosary, slowly reading some scripture or whatever it may be. Spend fifteen minutes of prayer every day in Lent and see how your life is different at Easter. See how it's better.

Our mission in life is strengthened by what we do right now, by sharing in the Eucharist. Through prayer, may we remain focused on our mission to follow Jesus and not be distracted by failure or success. May we continue to follow Jesus with lives of intentional faith and intentional love, every day.