

4th February 2018 (Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B)

Job 7:1-4,6-7; Psalm 146(147):1-6; 1 Corinthians 9:16-19,22-23; Mark 1:29-39.

He healed many who were sick.

Jesus continues to teach and to heal those who gathered around him. After healing the man with an evil spirit (last week), Jesus goes to the house of Simon and Andrew where he heals Simon's mother-in-law and, later on in the day, a large number of sick who are presented to him. At the time of Jesus, it was commonly believed that illness was caused by sin; Jesus' healing, therefore, is a sign of the new freedom given to those who approached to meet him. He comes to preach and teach the good news of a God who is loving and full of mercy, as can be witnessed by his healing ministry. He is also keen to speak to the people about the Father, and hence feels the need to go to other villages in the area.

In the second reading from the first letter of Paul to the Church in Corinth, Paul explains his relationship to the good news. He does not preach in order to make any personal gain, but because he feels it is his duty to do so. He has been called by God and invited to become a messenger of the good news. Paul understands that he did not deserve to be saved, salvation came to him as a total free gift from God and hence he it is his duty to proclaim the good news.

Paul's understanding of his duty to speak about God's good news should also be my own understanding; like Paul I have been freely chosen and given the good news. Paul met Christ on his way to Damascus; I met Christ through the sacrament of Baptism. Neither of us deserved this free gift from God. Like Paul I have not other choice but to give witness to this good news. I preach and witness to the good news in gratitude for this great gift of divine life given to me by God.

A few weeks ago we celebrated the feast of God who lowered himself, becoming like a slave, in order to live our own life; in a few weeks' time we will celebrate the moment when God lowers himself further still, allowing himself to be treated like a criminal, in order to die for our sins. In Jesus, God becomes a slave and a criminal for us in order to save us.

Paul recognises that he too, like Christ, needs to become a slave (servant) to all in order to be able to better speak to them about this good news. Paul felt that the best way to do this was not by preaching from on high, but by taking on the daily life of those he was living with. This way, by looking like one of them, he could better witness to and explain the good news to them. This method of evangelisation has been taken up by hundreds of missionaries who over the centuries went out to different countries, adapted themselves to the cultures of the peoples they were living with, and preached to them the gospel.

We too, each one of us, is called to be witnesses of this good news. Like Paul we too have been freely given the gift of salvation and it is now our duty to share this gift with those around us, not for our own gain, but in gratitude for God's great gift of love. Each of us are called to witness in the circles where we live. In the gospel Jesus did not only do miracles in the synagogue, nor did he only pray in the synagogue, but also in the house of Simon and Andrew and in the deserted places. We too need to bring God to our own homes, our places of work, our schools and the places where we recreate ourselves; God is there too and we need to be his witnesses.

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