

SEXAGESIMA – 2021

Job 7:1-4;6-7

1 Cor 9:16-19;22-23

Mk 1:29-39

If we describe Jonah as the reluctant prophet, Job could be described as the insistent prophet. He was suffering and Jewish belief was that only sinners suffered, yet Job insisted he was not a sinner and was in a right relationship with God. His friends tried to persuade him that he was delusional because even thinking that you were not a sinner is a sin!

The Book of Job does not provide any answer to the problem of evil and the suffering of the innocent. Those without faith in God just have to 'suck it up.' Christian faithful need to remember that at the centre of our faith is Jesus the wounded healer who has shown us that suffering and death do not have the last word. It is how we handle these things that matters, for out of them new life can emerge.

St Paul believes that suffering comes with the Christian territory. Jesus was baptised in the River Jordan, but he also described his crucifixion as a baptism. Suffering for disciples is our second baptism. In his play, 'Murder in the Cathedral,' TS Eliot gives Thomas à Becket these words as he tells the monks to open the cathedral door to let his assassins in. "The church shall be open. We are not here to triumph by fighting, by stratagem, or by resistance, not to fight with beasts as men. We have fought *the* beast and conquered. We have only to conquer now, by suffering. This is the easier victory." Becket's martyrdom changed the course of Church history in England.

Jesus conquered the evil beast and the link between the two incidents in today's gospel reading is the name 'Simon.' Jesus enters Simon and Andrew's house where Simon's mother-in-law is in bed sick. Jesus heals her and her response is to demonstrate her healing by getting up and serving her guests. Service is the correct response for her and us.

Next day Jesus goes out early to pray in a deserted place – not a synagogue or shrine. He didn't rush through the Jewish Daily prayers but spent time in silence in his Father's presence. Prayer is the foundation of all Jesus did for through prayer he discerned the priorities of his ministry. He was in prayer so long that Simon came looking for him suggesting that he had spent too long and the sick and suffering were queuing up in Capernaum waiting for him to heal them. Jesus knew that, but he discerned his mission was not only to demonstrate God's power through healing and exorcism, it was also to proclaim God's reign and call people to repent and embrace the Kingdom's values. The disciples and the sick only see Jesus doing visible things. Unlike the evil spirits they didn't see that he had come to destroy evil so that they could change direction in life and become what God calls us all to become – his children. The kingdom of God has to be visible in order for people to believe in it and embrace it.

St Paul understood that the gospel needs to be explained to people in ways they can grasp and that is what the Church's mission is, namely, to save souls by making the kingdom visible

and then explaining its meaning. There must be no gap between what we say and how we live.

In our post-Christian age the culture of the Church must change. We are the remnant and must live as such. Clergy and laity have equal but different roles in the Church's mission which is that the faith must be taught, learned and practised in order for God to be experienced in the world. It all begins with prayer.

Every disciple possesses gifts and skills that must be used in God's service both to his glory and the building up of his kingdom and Church. Choosing to serve, even accepting the second baptism of suffering, brings many blessings to us all. Jonah was a reluctant missionary, Job lost everything but maintained his faithfulness. Paul suffered greatly in his ministry but never abandoned the wounded healer who called him to serve the Gentiles.

In many areas of life, including the Church, one volunteer is worth 10 forced or reluctant conscripts. Jesus knew that. So should we, but are we hearing it?

Lent approaches!

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