

[Readings: Job 7:1-4, 6-7; Ps. 147; 1 Cor 9:16-19, 22-23; Mark 1:29-39]

If you could choose to be with any of the people in today's three readings for one day, who would they be? We probably wouldn't choose Job, who was full of drudgery and misery, troubled nights and hopeless days.

I always grin when the lector has to read depressing readings. The message is so depressing and then the lector says with great joy: "The Word of the Lord!" And what do WE say in response to this depressing news? "Thanks be to God!" Job is responding to his visiting friend, Eliphaz, who had insinuated that Job must have done something wrong to deserve the misfortune he faces.

Everything that Job had, including his wealth, his children, his happiness, and even his own personal health -- is taken away from him. Further, he endures accusations upon the part of his friends. They accuse him of infidelity against the Law. Job surely did something to deserve his suffering. Job says, "Just accept the misery and move on." Eventually, Job was able to cultivate an attitude of absolute dependence and reliance upon God.

God accompanies us in all our experiences and gives our lives meaning and purpose. Job did not possess this knowledge at the beginning of the book named after him; he had to learn it over time and over experience. His suffering, his misery of life, is part of a broader plan. Only God, the creator of the cosmos and the slayer of chaos, knows what it all means.

You and I cannot solve the mystery of life. Spoiler alert: We are not God! Jesus' healings are the beginning of an answer to Job's cry from the heart. Yes, life is hard -- it is for many, a tragedy. And here is the main point of my homily: God is faithful to us in our suffering. God is faithful in His beloved Son to the very end. God is there in our darkness, in our suffering. He comes to heal us in our woundedness. Indeed, "Praise the Lord, Who heals the brokenhearted and binds their wounds!"

Would you want to be Simon's mother-in-law? Would we choose to be her? Spending all day sick in bed with a fever? Jesus heals her. She gets up and feeds Jesus and his friends. But I can almost hear her saying to her

daughter: "So that's the guy that's got your husband running around here and there all hours of the day and night!" Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen jokingly would say that's the reason why Peter denied Jesus three times!

How about all those people who were ill or possessed by demons? Would you want to be one of them? No thanks. We have enough of them in our world, or we may be one of them ourselves.

But there are two other people to consider: St. Paul and Jesus.

Paul spent his days preaching the Gospel free of charge, and being "all things to all people." We also know that Paul faced constant challenges and hardship. The Good News is that Paul could endure everything because of the very nature of the Good News and from his sense of his role in God's plan. His preaching demanded that his hearers understood his message. THAT is how he became "all things to all people." He did not compromise the Gospel, he adjusted it. He says, "I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me."

Jesus does something equally miraculous – He confronts the evil that possesses a man. Later that day, as we hear in today's Gospel, Jesus spends the late night healing all kinds of illnesses and expelling all kinds of demons. Jesus confronts anything that stands in the way of God's Kingdom.

While you and I may not have the power or the authority to cast out demons, we still have the power to cast out many evils around us and within us. Do we hold grudges? Does our unwillingness to forgive stand in the way of reconciliation with others? Imagine the miraculous difference you and I would make if, by the grace of God, we could cast out THOSE demons!

Also, we CAN heal the sick and lonely simply by being present to them as Jesus was. Jesus did not say He was "too busy" or "too stressed."

How did He get re-energized to do all this?

Jesus re-fuels Himself by leaving the busy-ness of his work and going off to a deserted place, where He prays. In that deserted place, Jesus quiets Himself and communes with God. Because of this, both Jesus and Paul find themselves grounded and centered entirely on God, and to the service of others.

Where is YOUR "deserted place?" A bedroom, a corner of the living room

or family room? A room that has a lot of ceramic tile in it? Mine is my “man-cave” on the second floor of the rectory! And in the Upper Sacristy of the church.

Now, if both Jesus and Paul needed to pray in order to do God’s work, how much more so do you and I need to do the same. It should be abundantly clear that prayer makes all the difference in being able to handle the good, the bad and the ugly things that happen to us. If we begin and end each day in prayer, and come to this altar table every Sunday; if we listen to God in Scripture and receive the Risen Lord in the Eucharist, we more closely resemble Jesus.

When we teach by good example and confront evil, we become the very presence of Christ in the world. Through us living our days with the companionship of Jesus, the world will not only imagine, but will know the love of God in Christ Jesus.

What you and I can accomplish in our busy day may depend on what we do early in the morning and late at night. By surrendering to God first and last every day, we acknowledge that any good we accomplish is only because of God’s grace flowing through us. This frees us from any notion that we ourselves are the source. For the people of Galilee, the many healings performed by Jesus in and around Capernaum in today’s Gospel could have only come from the hand of God. And so it is with us. AMEN!