

[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. Job is responding to his visiting friend, Eliphaz, who had insinuated that Job must have done something wrong to deserve the misfortune he faces. Job learns to deal with the challenges of his life by adjusting his attitude regarding God, his personal health, his wealth and his welfare. All of it could be lost in a moment. Job was able to cultivate an attitude of absolute dependence and reliance upon God.

How about Simon's mother-in-law? Spending all day sick in bed with a fever? I'll pass! How about all those people who were ill or possessed by demons? No thanks. 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 live a way that reflected the truth of the Good News. He says, "I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me."

This weekend, we lift up in prayer three groups of people – the members of our parish who are involved in Stephen Ministry, Boy Scout Troop 1954 on this Boy Scout Sunday, and all consecrated men and women were celebrated on Friday, the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, and extended to this weekend on the World Day for Consecrated Life.

Stephen Ministry is the one-to-one lay caring ministry that takes place in congregations that use the Stephen Series system. Stephen Ministry congregations equip and empower lay caregivers -- called Stephen Ministers -- to provide high-quality, confidential, Christ-centered care to people who are hurting. Today, we re-commission our parish Stephen Ministers, some of whom have served over 30 years. St. Martin de Porres was the first parish in the Archdiocese of Detroit to establish this ministry. Congratulations!

Most of us are familiar with the Boy Scouts of America. Here at St. Martin de Porres, we are proud of our Troop 1954 and we thank them for their help in our parish and for their delicious popcorn and their delicious pancake breakfasts!

In 1997, Pope Saint John Paul II instituted a day of prayer for women and men in consecrated life. This celebration is attached to the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord on February 2nd. This Feast is also known as Candlemas Day; the day on which candles are blessed symbolizing Christ who is the light of the world. So too, those in consecrated life are called to reflect the light of Jesus Christ to all peoples.

The celebration of World Day for Consecrated Life is transferred to the following Sunday in order to highlight the gift of consecrated persons for the whole Church. We pray for all those who have made commitments in the consecrated life, and thank them on their special day. May they continue to be inspired by Jesus Christ and respond generously to God's gift of their vocation.

Last week, we listened to Jesus as He teaches in the synagogue on the very first day of His three years of public ministry. Although few of us can claim teaching as our profession, each of us can still teach by example. Some of life's most important lessons – love, forgiveness, patience, compassion, fidelity – are learned more outside the classroom than inside it.

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 God's people. 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!

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. 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, when we heal and pray, 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 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!