

**ECHOING GOD'S WORD
IN
THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY
FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
FEBRUARY 4, 2024**

SCRIPTURES:

Job 7:1-7	It is allowed to complain to God!
1 Corinthians 9:16-23	Paul writes about abuses in the Church.
Mark 1:29-39	Jesus always sets time aside for prayer.

READ THE SCRIPTURES:

Mark:

The Gospel of Mark is a document meant for the disciples of the Lord Jesus. They see in it the way the original followers of Jesus failed to understand and defaulted many times in their attempts to follow the Lord. Then, it becomes their duty to do better.

Jesus prayed often and with determined intensity. He set the pattern for those who would be his followers. They, too, must be people of prayer. Just as Jesus was able to do the wondrous things he did as a result of his intense communion with the heavenly Father, we, too, must commune deeply with God and go *out* to work those transforming ‘miracles’ of our everyday work. The healing power of Jesus will be replicated in our daily living if we are given to prayer in which we have access to the power of the living God, the same power that was in Jesus. We who are the body of Christ can do no less than Jesus who is our Head.

When Mark says that Jesus went to Peter’s mother-in-law and *helped her up*, he uses the same verb he uses when he means *raised from the dead* (Greek *egeiro*). The healing miracles of Jesus are not just interventions in nature. They are proclamations of the rising from that death that is the result of sin. When Jesus cures those who are afflicted in any way, he points to the future redemption from sin that will be brought about by his death and resurrection.

Even when the disciples managed to *track him down*, Jesus did not relinquish his profound communion with the Father. Bishop Fulton Sheen once said that anyone who is too busy to pray is far busier than God ever intended him/her to be! The more we have to do in this world, the more we need to be in prayer.

Silencing demons illustrates another characteristic of Mark’s Gospel. Jesus will be known for who he really is only when he has suffered, died, and been raised from the dead. The demons cannot know this.

Job:

The Jewish people were a lot more realistic in their prayer lives than we are. Their relationship with God was not altered by a vision through rose-colored glasses. They saw themselves as they were. When they were miserable, they complained! The Book of Job is one long complaint addressed to God. It represents the life of the community that has been stripped of all its assets. It has nothing left but its faith in God and its commitment to God. That will not be taken away! Now, the only thing left is to complain. Perhaps, God will hear that. In our lives, too, things are not always as

we would want them to be. Suffering is there, but God can change that if he wants to. We may have reached our limits with endurance. God had better intervene soon. I know that God can change this misery into happiness for me. Hope and trust in God means that I place everything in God's hands. That is our prayer, too.

Corinthians:

The key to getting along with people as a pastor in the church is never to talk about money! Paul set a very bad example for the pastors of our times. He literally went out and earned a living independently from his work as an apostle. The "worker-priests" in France 20 years ago tried to do the same. Most of them did not survive. They were not originally from the working class and could not really identify with the people with whom they worked. The ministry of the Gospel was not entirely credible in the fiction of their lives. Paul knew that he had to get along with people by getting *alongside* the way they lived. Otherwise, he would have no credibility with them. Surely, there is a lesson in all this for priests of today who need to find an opening into the hearts of the people to whom they seek to minister: to be strong with the strong and weak with the weak.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. To what extent is your daily decision-making guided by your life of prayer? Do you pray daily? When during the day? Do you pray about things that are real to you, about everyday things? Do you ask for guidance in the choices that you will make that day? Do you pray that God's will will be done in your daily decision-making?

2. Does your parish community (or family or prayer group) pray for things that are practical and concrete in the life of its members? Are the Prayers of the Faithful (General Intercessions) actually reflecting the prayer needs of the faithful? Who composes the Prayers of the Faithful for your weekend liturgies? Do you have any input? Should you?

3. Have you ever asked anybody to pray for you? When was the last time you did so? Do you believe that a disciple of Jesus Christ will be heard when that person prays for someone or something? Do you sometimes pray for yourself? Do you believe that your prayers are heard by God? Why? Or why not?

SUGGESTION FOR CHRISTIAN ACTION

Find out who prepares the General Intercessions for the weekend liturgies in your parish. Inquire as to how one may have some input into the things or persons being prayed for. Submit some prayer intentions to be offered by your parish (or family or prayer group) at the weekend liturgies.

PRAYER

Lord, I pray that the demons in my life
may be recognized for who they are
and be replaced by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, my Savior.

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

The power to expel demons belongs to the Church by virtue of the abiding presence and power of Christ in the community of faith. People who believe in God and have found the power of Jesus Christ in their lives do not have to fear that evil will overwhelm them in their daily existence. The Holy Spirit who lives in the hearts of those who love God will not allow Satan to crush the minds and hearts of Jesus' disciples. Why do some faithful persons live in fear, as if the Christ had not overcome evil?

In the early days of the Charismatic Renewal in the Catholic Church, 1960 - 1980, some Catholics went around 'exorcising' people whom they thought were 'possessed' by the devil. They were perhaps expecting some supernatural manifestations of evil and of deliverance. Some seemed to like playing supernatural games. I remember being asked why Jesus did not 'cure' everyone on whom they laid their hands in the hospital or nursing homes!

Jesus spent much time in prayer. Only after prayer did he go *out* and cure those who were sick and cast *out* demons from their lives. The life of prayer that his disciples lead must be similar to his. When a community has committed itself to prayer in the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus the healer and deliverer will act through that community to bring about reconciliation and harmony in God's creation. I may not be the one through whom this power flows, but someone in the Church will fulfill that ministry, someone to whom that charism or gift has been given.

Shortly after I was ordained as a priest in the Church, my father was diagnosed with cancer. He did not like priests very much (!) perhaps because he had known some who were not faithful to their calling. But he believed that priests could heal, just as Jesus could heal. One day, he asked me if I would heal him! I was frightened beyond words. I stumbled around for words of excuse. He said, "Will you or won't you?" I said, "I don't think I can." He responded, "I know you can. Perhaps you don't want to!" I did not understand. Jesus Christ works his power of healing and saving through the community of faith. Sometimes, that power is at work in the ministry of a priest. Sometimes, it is at work in the ministry of one who is not a priest. Only the work of prayer can activate that power in the Church community which is the body of Christ. My father knew in his own way what I did not know. He wanted prayers.

See: The Catechism: # 2663- 2758

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