

the Sunday Readings



*And the whole city was gathered around the door
and Jesus cured many who were sick with various
diseases, and cast out many demons.*

(Mark 1 : 33 – 34a)

5th Sunday Ordinary Time

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*a heart which sees*¹

introduction

Jesus starts his ministry in Capernaum. The evangelist makes the point that Jesus went to a synagogue on the sabbath.² The message he delivered there, is called, 'a new teaching'.³ It is appreciated by some but is rejected by others. On the same day, after leaving the synagogue, Jesus goes to a friend's house with his disciples. There he performs the first healing mentioned by Mark. He restores Peter's mother-in-law to health – a sign of the realm of God which he has come to announce!

first reading: Job 7: 1a, 2–4, 6–7⁴

[Job's lament about his seemingly endless suffering]

*Is not life on Earth a drudgery,
its days like those of a hireling?(1a)
Like a slave who longs for the shade,
a hireling who waits for wages,(2)
So I have been assigned months of futility,
and troubled nights have been counted off for me.(3)
When I lie down I say, "When shall I arise?"
then the night drags on;
I am filled with restlessness until the dawn.(4) . . .
My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle;
they come to an end without hope.(6)
Remember that my life is like the wind;
my eye will not see happiness again.(7)*

The Book of Job is framed by two references to the righteous Job. In the first prose section the Accuser says: "You (the Lord) have blessed the work of Job's hands and his possessions have increased in the land . . .".⁵ In the final prose section it says: "In all the land there were no women so beautiful as Job's daughters and their father gave them inheritance along with their brothers".⁶

The two prose sections in which these references occur and the poetry section between them from which today's reading comes, have to do with having, losing and having again.⁷ In *chapter 7*, as the poetry continues, it becomes a

1 Front Cover image: [Christ healing many diseases](#) – Greek Orthodox Icon, 14th Century.

2 Mk.1:21

3 *Ibid.* v.27

4 The biblical excerpts are drawn from the New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), published by Oxford University Press (1994).

5 Jb.1:10 – *the Book of Job* dates from about the time of the Exile (6th century) the reading comes from a poetry section which reflects the received idea that the wicked ought not to flourish.

6 Jb.42:15

7 The poetry reflects the consensus of the period. Wicked people ought not to have – and really don't get possessions. Job's three friends agree that life is organised so that socially responsible people end up getting good things. The practice of the community and the verdict of God hold this together. These friends believe it and Job himself believes it – for a while. That's Job's problem.

discussion about abuses of social power.⁸ Something is wrong in society. Helpless people are displaced off their land because social institutions work in favour of the powerful rich and against the helpless poor. In Job's last great speech about his innocence, he announces that because of his innocence he should receive his portion, or inheritance, from the Lord God. He expects a material reward from God given through the social processes in which he trusts.⁹ But in *chapter 21*, Job asks, "How often is the lamp of the wicked put out? How often does calamity come upon them? How often does the Lord distribute pain in the Lord's anger?"¹⁰ These rhetorical questions expect the answer: "Never is the lamp of the wicked put out!"

Job voices the common collusion between oppressor and victim. There are two ways of speaking about the Lord's justice. One way is by the people who suffer. The other is by the people who are happy because those others suffer. In *chapter 7*, Job speaks about the justice of the Lord from the perspective of those for whom the system doesn't work. The victims don't understand it. In *chapter 31*, Job still speaks with the trusting voice of one for whom the system ought to produce happiness. Taking *the Book* as a whole, it poses the question of God's justice in a materialist way. It raises tough questions about the social system of pay-offs in which the Lord is thought to be embodied.

In the last chapter (in prose), Job does get everything back,¹¹ and it becomes clear that Job doesn't get everything back by God acting, 'out of the blue' – by some supernatural act. Job gets everything back through social channels of rehabilitation.¹² The final prose section suggests a new consensus about God's justice and the great promises of God – the exchange by which the righteous petitioner, seeking justice, receives their true entitlement.¹³

response: Psalm 147 : 1 – 6

[praise for God's care for Jerusalem]

*Praise the Lord! How good it is to sing praises to our God;
for he is gracious, and a song of praise is fitting.(1)*

The Lord builds up Jerusalem; he gathers the outcasts of Israel.(2)

He heals the broken-hearted and binds up their wounds.(3)

8 *Jb.12:24-25 & 24:1-15*

9 *Jb.31*

10 *Jb.21:17*

11 *Jb.42*

12 *Ibid. v.11* – Job receives goods back because the community gives them back to him! He receives his reward as a just man through social processes. *The Book* in its totality states that God's justice finally is practised through the redress that is mediated through the social processes. Human action is matched by a divine blessing (v.12) but divine blessing cannot substitute for the social process. The work of the human community makes available Job's experience of God's justice.

13 The story of Job affirms the general restoration of Israel to the land. For Job the rehabilitation is done through an equitable social process. The resolution of justice isn't done, 'from on high' by the Lord. The great promise, can't be separated from the economic details. *The Book of Job* along with the story of *Jeremiah* – pose the justice of God question in its most acute form in the Israelite Scriptures. Resolution of the question in both *the Book of Job* and *Jeremiah*, happens through corrected social processes. The cry of Job (*Jb.21:7*) is resolved in chapter 42, by the community's restoring (*Jb.42:11*). The promises of God are enacted through social performance – or they are not enacted at all!

*He determines the number of the stars; he gives to all of them their names.(4)
Great is our Lord & abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure.(5)
The Lord lifts up the downtrodden; the Lord casts the wicked to the ground.(6)*

The history of humankind is filled with stories of the struggle for power – over against weakness. But the speaker issues a different understanding of the nature of power and weakness and the way the two elements of life are related. In reality there is only one Power – all other powers are illusory and don't last. To participate in this Power, is to admit one's own weakness and dependence on the Creator and Sustainer of life.

The speaker moves from a statement of the Lord's strength to a recognition of the dependence of frail humans on that strength. God's extension of grace is understood as an expression of the Lord's compassion; humankind's acceptance of that grace is portrayed as an act of faith. Praise is the proper activity of the God's people, because the Lord *'builds the city'* and *'sets the stars'* on one hand and on the other, saves those who are incapable of saving themselves (vv.2-4). The Lord's great power is known to the Israelites (vv.4-5). The traditions of creation and the memory of liberation, bear witness to the same the Lord. God's cosmic creative and sustaining power and the God's personal intimacy on behalf of the Israelites, suggest that the speakers never stand alone or without a social context.

When the speaker focuses on the basis for praising the Lord, it is to recognise that it is the Lord who has built the holy City and ended exile. It is the Lord's powerful intervention that has turned around the conventional order in the world and the speaker celebrates this new order. It requires recalling its foundations in the acts of compassion and justice of the Lord. The remembered reasons for praise provide a ground for certitude and gratitude; but also for criticism. When the praise of the summons is uncriticised by the foundations, we can be sure things are being absolutised beyond criticism which is the temptation of temple-worship.

second reading: 1 Corinthians 9 : 16 – 19, 22 – 23 [the apostle foregoes some rights for the sake of others]

*If I proclaim the gospel, this gives me no ground for boasting, for an obligation is laid on me, and woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel!(16)
For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward; but if not of my own will, I am entrusted with a commission.(17) What then is my reward? Just this: that in my proclamation I may make the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my rights in the gospel.(18) For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them.(19) To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law.(20) To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free*

from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law.(21) To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some.(22) I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.(23)

The importance of retelling the gospel story, emerges in the way Paul justifies the decision not to accept financial support from the Corinthians. The urgency to proclaim the gospel means he is prepared to forgo his 'rights'. This compulsion determines whether or not he exercises his 'rights'.¹⁴ Paul constantly confronts us with our identity as Christian disciples and the life-orienting character and absolute centrality of the Gospel. The matter of Christian identity is at the heart of the passage.

Two issues occupy Paul: the eating of food associated with idol-worship;¹⁵ and the right of an apostle to receive monetary support from the people being served.¹⁶ The apostle describes his own behaviour regarding each issue in terms of the mandate of the Gospel. For him there is 'the compulsion' of the Gospel – an obligation laid upon him (v.16). This compulsion derives from the nature of the Gospel itself and from Paul's sense of his own place in the economy of God. The Gospel is intended to be lived and preached. By its very nature its a story that demands retelling. That surely goes for all Christians, as well as for apostles.

The critical importance of retelling the Gospel story, emerges in the way Paul justifies his decision not to accept financial support from the Corinthians. He has 'a right' to such support, but he has been defending his role as an apostle. He gives as the character of apostleship is having a vision of *the Risen Lord* and receiving a call to witness to Jesus (vv.1-2). This is the basis of his 'right' to support (vv.4-14). But his central point – once he established this right – is that he won't exercise it in Corinth (v.15), because he wants the foundation of his work as an apostle to be unambiguous. His reward is to receive no reward (vv.16-19). For Paul the gospel must be offered freely. He says that his freedom enables him to serve as, 'slave to all'.

gospel reading: Mark 1 : 29 – 39¹⁷

[Jesus heals many at Simon's house]

As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.(29) Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once.(30) He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to

14 Paul repeatedly nudges us about the comfortable accommodations we make so easily with our surrounding culture. Although he is the theologian of grace, he refuses to let the listener/reader rest easy with the Gospel as if it were a take-or-leave option.

15 1 Co. 8 & 10:23-33

16 1 Co.9:1-15.

17 Most of the action takes place in and around the city of Capernaum which stood at the centre of a circle of neighbouring country towns in Galilee. These 'towns' were village-sized clusters of clans. Such clans banded together for economic survival.

serve them.(31) That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons.(32) And the whole city was gathered around the door.(33) And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.(34) In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.(35) And Simon and his companions hunted for him.(36) When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you".(37) He answered, "Let us go on to the neighbouring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do".(38) And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.(39)

The private healing (of Simon Peter's mother-in-law) occurs on the evening of the Sabbath, after sunset, implying that sabbath was over. Earlier on the Sabbath, Jesus had attained a degree of infamy for a public healing in the synagogue at Capernaum (vv.23-27). Then, Mark tells of two attempts by Jesus to withdraw from public attention. First, to the privacy of his disciples' family home; and then to the solitude of the wilderness. The healing of Simon Peter's mother-in-law is a private event that has few witnesses. The second healings take place the same evening (v.32) and they take place in public (v.33). Then, there is the scene of the following morning, which implicitly refers back to what had gone before on the previous day (vv.35,37).¹⁸

In the second healing, the power of Jesus has become a matter of public knowledge. People bring to Jesus, *'all who were sick or possessed with demons'* and *'the whole city'* gathers at the door (vv.32-33). This claim serves notice to the reader, that Jesus isn't a public figure yet. His real identity as, *'Son of God'* remains hidden. However, for *'demons'* knowledge of who Jesus is, forbids them to speak. Jesus is sought for his power to heal. But his teaching isn't acknowledged, nor is his real identity uncovered. The final scene confirms that Jesus is misunderstood even by Simon and the other disciples. When Jesus seeks a deserted place to pray, he is *'hunted down'* by those who demand his return. It is a demand implicit in the words, *'Everyone is searching for you'*. Jesus rejects this demand. He doesn't return to Capernaum. Rather he moves on instead, towards other towns in Galilee – so that he may resume his task of proclaiming the realm of God. Jesus subordinates his power for healing and exorcism, to the greater need to proclaim the realm of God. This is his primary task. Proclamation of the reigning of God is the only

18 The customary features of a miracle story are included in the account of the healing of Simon Peter's mother-in-law. The description of the illness; the healing itself; and the demonstration of the healing. This last feature takes place when the woman *'began to serve them'*, proving that she was sufficiently recovered to resume her daily routines. Her behaviour is exactly what is called for in Jesus' later teaching on discipleship. For example, the teaching elicited by James and John's request for power. The two disciples are present in Simon's house, but evidently they didn't understand then, the import of the mother-in-law's actions.

context in which the power of healing gains its true meaning. The disciples had witnessed Jesus' healing of Simon Peter's mother-in-law. And they will witness Jesus' ministry as a whole. Just as someone tells Jesus of the woman's illness and the four disciples act as a bridge between Jesus' powers and the woman's need, so the Christian disciple is the witness, or bridge, between human need and the life-giving power of God in Jesus. The issue is one of slavery to freedom. The liberative action is performed by Jesus alone!

What is significant, however, is that healings and exorcisms are now said to be common. This is the historical basis for a responsible understanding of early Christian history. Just as the power of sin is best understood in the light of saving grace, so to is the power of the demonic. The power of evil is best explained from the standpoint of its conquest in Christ. Hence the silencing of the demons is one aspect of 'the messianic secret'. The 'demons' know Jesus and are refused the right to speak. The disciples learn of Jesus' nature and identity and are also refused permission to make it known at this stage.¹⁹

In Mark's theology the resurrection may not be proclaimed or experienced apart from the Cross. And so Jesus is shown withdrawing to a remote place to pray (v.35) while the crowds are still excited about his healings and exorcisms. When Simon and his friends find him, Jesus decides to go on around the area 'preaching' (vv.38-39). He 'comes out' from Capernaum into the whole Galilean region, though a reference to his, 'coming from God' is just barely possible to preach. Mark doesn't separate 'preaching' and 'teaching'. Casting out demons is also a part of Jesus' ministry, though it is mentioned here primarily, to introduce the healing which immediately follows.

for sharing:²⁰

- *Job laments his seemingly endless suffering. Comment on Job 7 : 1 – 4, 6 – 7*

19 Mk. 8:30 & 9:9

20 Lectio Divina: Lectio Divina: is a Latin term for 'reading with God'. It had its origin in monastic life, but anyone can use it. *Lectio divina* is a way of praying using the Scriptures. If practised consistently, it gently leads us into a deeper relationship with Christ as we open ourselves to him. The practice requires a quiet space, a short passage of Scripture and a willingness to give time to the project. There are four steps in the traditional practise of *lectio divina*. The steps don't have to have the following order: *lectio* (reading) – read the passage of Scripture read slowly - more than once. If a particular word, phrase, or sentence seems significant (even if you don't know why) you may want to write it down. *meditatio* (reflection) – let the significant words fill your mind without straining to analyse them. We are in GOD's presence and so let the Holy Spirit lead your understanding of the words. *oratio* (prayer) – allow your heart to speak to GOD, in words inspired by the passage of Scripture, or by the thoughts that have come to you, while reflecting on it. *contemplatio* (rest) – let go of ideas and words and allow yourself to rest in the presence of GOD, in simple and wordless contemplation. This booklet gives the context and some commentary on each of the readings and the psalm used in the Sunday's liturgy. Familiarity with the texts and the commentary beforehand, can better prepare our hearing and understanding the passages in our worship. Whatever our preparation for doing this exercise and whatever questions we may use to break open the passage, we must be conscious of Christ's promise: 'Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them'. (Mt.18:20).

- *Paul foregoes some of his entitlements for other's sake. Comment on 1 Corinthians 9 : 16 – 19, 22 – 23*
- *Jesus heals many at Simon's house. Comment on Mark 1 : 29 – 39*

prayer:²¹

*Out of Your power and compassion, O God,
You sent Your Son into our afflicted world
to proclaim the day of salvation.
Heal the broken-hearted, bind up our wounds.
Bring us health of body and spirit
and raise us to new life in Your service.
We make our prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son,
who lives and reigns with You in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever. Amen.*

review:²²

We tend to reduce God's reigning to private, so-called "spiritual matters" of healing. Yet today's texts suggest an end to that way of thinking. They suggest that our old social reality – the one we are familiar with – is doomed and that a new and surprising social reality, is beginning! This new reality is offered through Jesus' compassionate healings and teachings about, "the reigning of God" that it happens - not somewhere else or sometime in a vague future era; but here and now! It happens, according to the texts, in the comings and goings of everyday life in Jesus' time and in our own time! But our hearts find it difficult to see beyond our settled ways and our own narrow interests. The texts offer examples of Jesus performing God's future; of showing the way things can be. We so-called "disciples" of Jesus, disregard God's purpose as revealed by the texts at our peril! We we still tend to regard our present social reality as the only way things can be! If the truth of the text be realised, God's reigning is never limited to our private, "spiritual" world. It embraces the whole of our lives and the whole of our service to others.

21 The prayer that concludes the Lectio Divina is ICEL's 1998 opening prayer from the Proper of the Day. These prayers draw upon the concrete and vivid images of Scripture and conclude with a clearly focused petition inspired by the readings.

22 the review: – at the end of each reflection the review examines one of the themes of the readings, usually drawn from the gospel, that provides an opportunity to check our own performance, in the light of the Word and Eucharist that we have previously heard and experienced.