

'OUR LIVES AS SERVANTS'

5th Sunday Ordinary Time – HOMILY – 4 FEBRUARY 2018

CONTROVERSY

In group sharing, some reading this Gospel passage get angry and don't read any further. Some recall deep pain, past and current because of stereotyping of women and injustice to them.

Some read it and focus on the later part of the passage with Jesus in prayer.

Let us take up time to reflect on its position in relation to the Gospel.

Let reflect on Simon's mother-in-law, (chapter 1)

and on the women at the cross, (chapter 15)

and on the teaching of Jesus on service. (chapter 10)

and the woman who anointed Jesus for burial (chapter 14)

The first part of the passage reads:

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

The anger can come from the words *'and she began to serve them'*.

She had been sick with fever and now waits on them.

And many other insights and comments.

WHY DOES MARK'S GOSPEL MENTION THE LAST SENTENCE ABOVE?

Though the shortest of the four Gospels, Mark gives some detail in passages.

DOES HE INCLUDE THAT SENTENCE TO SHOW THAT THE HEALING OF JESUS IS COMPLETE?

That Simon's mother-in-law is now fully healed. The fever is gone.

Before in the synagogue, Jesus healed a person with an unclean spirit.

Then the word *'euthus'* 'immediately' is used.

For three weekends now we have heard *'euthus'* in Gospel passages from chapter 1.

Jesus immediately goes from the synagogue to the house.

DOES THIS PASSAGE SHOW A DIFFERENT ASPECT OF THE HEALING POWER OF JESUS?

In the synagogue Jesus shows his spiritual healing of the unclean spirit.

In the house Jesus shows his healing of someone with physical illness - a fever.

'Ethus' appears again, translated as *“and they told him about her at once”*.

Jesus takes her by the hand and **raises her**.

Cured, she serves them. The verb *“serves”* translates the Greek *diakoneo*.

Diakonia in the New Testament becomes a special word for Christian service, for ministry.

Sick in bed. Fever. And all that means.

To be cured.

**HOW DOES SHE WANT TO RESPOND TO JESUS?
IS SHE AMAZED, WANTING TO GIVE THANKS?**

AT THE CROSS

Remembering the word “raise”,

let us go forward to where Jesus has died in Mark 15.

**WHO WAS THERE? WHO WERE HIS COMPANIONS?
WITH SOLDIERS AROUND HIM, WAS THERE ROOM FOR OTHERS?**

“There were also women looking on from a distance, among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the young and of Joses, and Salome. These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee, and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.”

In Mark’s Gospel there is a special bond with the Galilean women disciples.

**WHO ELSE HAS JESUS CURED?
HAS HE CURED RELATIVES OF THEIRS?**

Two of the women follow on to see where the body of Jesus is laid.

Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses. MK 15:47.

The verb translated above as “provided” is also from the same root as the noun diakonia.

JESUS SPEAKS OF SERVICE

Jesus develops the notion of service.

Remember in the beginning of today’s passage we hear that James and John are present at the house.

“they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.”

In MK 10:35 James and John request of Jesus a special honour and privilege. They say:

“Grant us to sit, one at your hand and one at your left, in your glory”

This results in the other ten getting angry with James and John.

Jesus gives us insight into service - *diakonia*.

We are not to lord it over others.

We are to be servants.

And the first must be the slave of all.

In MK 10:45 we hear **Jesus as servant**.

“For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life for the ransom of many.”

Again, the Greek verb related to the noun *Diakonia*.

And we remember Simon’s mother-in-law, and the contrast between her, and James and John.

THE WOMAN WHO SERVED JESUS BY ANOINTING HIM FOR BURIAL

We recall another woman, in chapter 14, who anointed the head of Jesus at Bethany and the criticism she receives from people around her.

In MK 14:6 we hear:

'But Jesus says, "Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She had done a good service for me."

In MK 14:8 we hear of her insight:

"She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial."

In MK 14:9 Jesus highlights her action not just that day but forever.

"Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her."

OUR SERVICE

And we ask ourselves:

HOW DO WE SERVE GOD IN OUR LIVES?

HOW DO WE FOLLOW JESUS WHO SERVES?

HOW DO WE SERVE EACH OTHER?

DO WE SERVE WITH JOY OR WITH RELUCTANCE?

WITH GRATITUDE OR DEMANDING FAVOURS?

Today's Gospel passage continues:

*"That evening, at sunset,
they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons.
And the whole city was gathered around the door.
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."*

PRAYER

With so much happening and the immediacy of it all,

where is the time for prayer, for recollection, for discernment on future direction?

The Gospel continues:

*"In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up
and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed."*

But the passage continues:

*"And Simon and his companions hunted for him.
When they found him, they said to him, 'Everyone is searching for you.'*

Do you recall those experiences when at home or work
when someone is searching for you?

Hunting for you.

Maybe the demands of children, or pressure from people at work,
or study timelines,

deadlines, demands for attention now, work brought home.

Amid all the pressures on him, Jesus takes what time he can to pray and to discern.

He doesn't just drift along. He reaffirms his mission. The passage concludes:

"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.' And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons."

The injustice to and stereotyping of women always needs to be challenged.

And to recognise that the reference about Simon's mother-in-law in Mark's Gospel does not stand alone.

The Discipleship of Service as a Christian is developed in the Gospel.

Jesus is the Servant we follow.

Let us pray.

Fr. Gerry

[Readings: <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/020418.cfm>]

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