

## 5<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, CYCLE B

*Job 7: 1-4, 67; Psalm 147: 1-6; 1 Cor. 9 16-19 22-23; Mark 1: 29-39*

Holy Spirit Catholic Church: February 7, 2021

When Jesus reaches out to touch someone, they are healed.

By the compassionate touch of Jesus, human beings are made whole.

He speaks no words to Simon's mother-in-law, who is laid low by a fever, bedridden, and unable to welcome Jesus and his friends to her home.

Jesus simply reaches out and lifts her up from her bed, and the fever flees at his touch.

In next Sunday's Gospel as we continue our journey with Jesus through the 1<sup>st</sup> Chapter of Mark, Jesus will reach out to touch the untouchable one—a leper—reuniting him with his family and community, making him whole.

Jesus could have stayed at a distance and spoken a word to heal the leper, but instead he reaches out to touch a man no one touches for fear of catching his contagious disease.

By touching those who are ill and whose illness isolates them from others, Jesus shows God's concern to not only cure the body but to heal the sick person from the effect of their illness by reuniting them with their loved ones and community. And to let them know by his touch that they have not and never will be cut off from God.

Curing deals with only the physical malady while healing makes the person whole again, as Jesus heals broken hearts and crushed spirits resulting from physical illness.

Later in Mark's Gospel, Jesus' touch will restore life to two children thought to be dead. He strides into the room of the 12-year old daughter of Jairus and takes her hand, saying, "*Talitha koum,*" which means, "*Little girl, I say to you arise*". (5:41) He then lifts her up from what was thought to be her death bed and gives her back to her parents.

Then, when coming down from the Mountain of his Transfiguration, Jesus encounters a boy possessed by a demon, whom he sets free. However, it appears the exorcism has killed the boy, as he lays lifeless on the ground. But Jesus takes his hand, raises him, and the boy stands up, his life restored. (9:27)

The healing, life restoring touch of Jesus reminds one of the Creation scene crafted by Michaelangelo into the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, where God reaches out his finger to touch Adam's finger and *voila*—the human being is given life and created in the image and likeness of God.

The way Jesus raises up Simon's mother-in-law, the 12 year old girl, and the little boy in Mark's Gospel is echoed in the words of the priest in the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick.

As the priest makes the sign of the cross with the holy oil on the palms of the sick person, he says,

*"May the Lord who frees you from sin, save you, and raise you up."*

These words refer not only to the ultimate hope of being raised up from physical death resulting from illness but the power of Jesus' touch in the present moment, raising up the sick person to a new life now.

Raising them up from the death of despair to a new life filled with hope. Raising them up from the death of isolation that sickness causes to know they are never separated from the love of others or from the love of God.

Jesus longs to heal whatever is broken in us, to make us whole. All of us need to experience his healing touch in one way or another.

Some of us need to be healed of the despair caused by this pandemic, to be able to trust again in God's goodness. We open ourselves to the Lord's healing touch when we express honestly to the Lord the hurt in our heart in the form of a lament, like Job does.

If we didn't know Job's backstory, we might assume he is suffering the effects of a pandemic. Listen again to his words:

*"Life is a drudgery, months of misery, troubled nights, I shall not see happiness again."*

Who among us have not felt what Job feels, especially during the past 11 months!

But Job has it worse off than we do, because he has lost everything, and I do mean everything: all of his vast riches, his entire family, and even his health.

The words we hear Job speak today are actually spoken to his friends, but if we continue on to the next verses in chapter 7 in the Book of Job, we would hear Job turn to God and addresses God:

*"Why have you set me up as a object for your attack, or why should I be a target for you?" (7:12)*

These are strong words to address to God, but they are honest words. Job is not afraid to lament, to tell God directly about his suffering and to question God about the reason for his suffering.

The book of Job is actually one long prayer as this man of faith addresses God from the depth of his pain and ultimately encounters God, receiving not answers but healing, not a solution to the mystery of suffering but an assurance that God's presence is more than enough.

For others of us, the healing we seek from the Lord might not be from despair in the face of human suffering,

but rather the longing for the Lord to touch and heal a broken relationship.

Or we might need to ask the Lord to touch the memory of a hurt, which is still like an open, festering wound.

Or sometimes we carry hurts from our childhood which are buried so deeply, we are not even aware they are there, but the Lord is, and longs to touch them, if we give Him permission.

Others among us live in the shadow of deep sorrow which impacts every part of life, a bed of sadness which only the Lord can lift us from and restore us to joy again.

Whenever we experience the healing touch of the Lord restoring us to life, we respond as Simon's mother-in-law did by serving others.

As the Lord raises us up to new life, we want to serve him in others.

We desire to reach out and touch those who are hurting and share the healing love we have experienced.

To bring hope to the hopeless,  
joy to the joyless,  
and peace to troubled hearts.

As we touch others with the compassionate touch of the Lord, something remarkable happens.

We experience not only his healing love flowing through us but also surrounding us, strengthening us to love even more.

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