

A couple of weeks ago, the secondary discussion topic in our parish Small Church Communities was about exorcisms. In today's Gospel, we heard that the world Jesus encountered was filled with demons, and he came to exorcize them. The evil spirits were quick to recognize Jesus' authority and to respond to his word. Confrontation with the devil is a common theme in Jesus' life. He didn't tell us that the devil was just a metaphor for evil, or a superstition. He tells us that the devil is real.

I've heard some parishioners say that when they were talking about demons back then, they were primitive and superstitious and thought that all sickness was the result of demons. That's just not true. Mark's Gospel tells us that Jesus made a distinction between evil spirits and illnesses. We should too.

Jesus came into this world to touch the misery of human life, to heal us, from big things like demons down to the very small things like the misery of a fever. He has the power to bring peace to us in the midst of our suffering. The church picked the first reading from Job for today to illustrate that Jesus comes into this world not just to cast out the devil - he's also Jesus the healer.

As we walk through this valley of tears, we taste the drudgery and the misery that Job talked about in the first reading. It's about the fact that life on earth is drudgery and can be really difficult. In the midst of that misery, in the midst of that suffering, in the midst of that sickness, we have to always remember that Jesus is the ultimate victor, the ultimate savior. Jesus is the divine physician, who one day, whether in this life or the next, will heal us.

Even the Psalm today is saying that God has the power to heal us. We have a God who heals the brokenhearted. We have a God who knows everything. He knows what you're going through. He knows about your suffering. He's not ignorant of the misery, drudgery, illness and suffering that human beings can experience in this valley of tears. So the God of the Bible is not a distant God.

It is that God who becomes human in Jesus and touches the hand of Simon's mother-in-law and says get up, be healed. That's the God who comes to us in the ongoing ministry of Jesus, present to us in this Eucharist today.

Today's Gospel begins right after Jesus expelled a demon in the synagogue. The main Sabbath meal at around noon followed the synagogue service. The house of Simon is only a few hundred feet down the street.

Simon's mother-in-law is sick with a fever. Jesus touches her by the hand, and lifts her up. So it seems that Jesus was also attentive to the smaller sufferings of human life, the basic things that we all struggle with, like illness.

We are told when she was healed the woman "began to wait on them." That makes it sound like Jesus wanted to heal her so she could fix the noontime meal. But the word Mark uses is the word for "church work," or ministry. Mark is implying that she "waits" on the community and does the work of the community. Word got out from the exorcism at the synagogue earlier that day. But since it was the Sabbath, people waited until after sundown to start bringing the ill or possessed to the door of Simon's house - so she had work to do.

Then and now, when people experience new life from Jesus, they are willing and able to serve others. What one receives one wants to share. That is why, when I say "Go forth" at the end of Mass, it is your mission to take the Good News out to the world.

The best ministers among us do their work with a sense of joy that seems to come from their own experience of Jesus "raising them up." In fact, believers who minister to others say they get more out of what they do than they put into it. It is as if, in the midst of their ministry to others, Jesus is taking them by their hand and "raising them up."

Like Simon's mother-in-law, there is only one way we can thank Him - by serving Him and His gospel. Simon's mother-in-law thanks the Lord by serving the Lord.

Our lives should reflect our thanksgiving. Paul, of course, knew this when, in our 2nd reading, he gives us an explanation of his teaching and preaching of the good news - the good news of Jesus' coming. That's his mission - that's what he's been called to do.

Yes, we're all called to share the Good News with the world, even if our little corner of the world might be small indeed. We must tell everyone the good news, the purpose for which Jesus has come - that others, too, may have a share in this good news.

In *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis says that evangelization is not just for great saints and apostles like Paul, but for every single baptized Christian. All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, anyone who has truly experienced God's love doesn't need much time or lengthy training to go out and tell others about that love as "missionary disciples." Because a missionary disciple is someone who not only believes the faith but studies it and learns it, and then shares that faith it with others. That's what Pope Francis is calling every Catholic to be.

Jesus is not just there for the big things in our lives. He is there for the small things, the simple fevers as well as the demons. It is that God who becomes human in Jesus and touches the hand of Simon's mother-in-law and says get up, be healed. That's the God who comes to us in the ongoing ministry of Jesus. That ministry of Jesus is present to us in this Eucharist today. And how Jesus works in our lives is what we are called to tell others about. As baptized Christians, that's our mission.

Amen?

With thanks to Brant Pitre and Pope Francis

- Deacon Jack Schaefer