

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time – B
Fr. Chad S. Green
Mary, Queen of Peace Catholic Church
Sammamish, Washington
7 February 2021

Job 7:1-4, 6-7
Psalm 147
1 Corinthians 9:16-19, 22-23
(Matthew 8:17) Mark 1:29-39

Freedom to Do Good and Bring Church to Others

In the Gospel of Mark, before Jesus *tells* us why He came into our world, He begins by *showing* us. Last week, this week, and next week, we hear about a series of healings.¹ Soon, after being questioned about his healing acts Jesus will say: “Those who are well do not need a physician, but the sick do. I did not come to call the righteous but sinners.”² But, until then, Jesus lets His acts of healing reveal His mission.

These healings show us that God is with us and close to us, even—and especially—when we are suffering. Furthermore, these *physical* healings of *some* people serve as a sign of a more radical and universal healing that God has in mind for *all* people. This more radical and universal healing is His “victory over sin and death.”³ Jesus takes away the sins of the world, thus redeeming each of us, and setting us free to live with Him forever in His Heavenly Kingdom.

That’s, generally, what these healing acts reveal to us. However, we can learn even more from Jesus and those who are cured by looking at the specific circumstances of each healing.

+++

In today’s healing of Simon’s mother-in-law, we learn from her by what she did once she was cured. Jesus “grasped her hand, and helped her up. Then the fever left her and she waited on them.”⁴ This shows us that she wasn’t cured just for the sake of being relieved of pain. As Bishop Mueggenborg wrote: Simon’s mother-in-law “used her gift of healing for the purpose of

ministry. ... Oftentimes, we use our gifts only for our benefit or to do our will, but she used her gift to serve Jesus and do His will.”⁵

This is a good example for us of what freedom looks like. Sometimes we initially think of freedom as doing whatever one wants to do. That’s not what freedom is. Freedom is taking personal responsibility for pursuing the common good, while being “guided by reason and virtue.” License is doing whatever one wants to do without taking responsibility, which destroys community, leads to sin, and ultimately restricts one’s freedom.⁶

Jesus didn’t come to give us *license*; Jesus came to give us *freedom*.⁷ When He healed Simon’s mother-in-law, she was set free from sickness, and immediately responded by demonstrating her freedom to now do good in service of Jesus and others. Jesus does the same for us! *Sometimes* with a physical healing. *All the time*, when He forgives us, which heals us of the sickness that our sins cause, thus setting us free to pursue virtue and do good in service of Jesus and others.

+++

In today’s healing of Simon’s mother-in-law, we learn from Jesus by what He did before the cure. Or, more precisely, by noticing where Jesus went from. Before He entered the house of Simon, Jesus went from the synagogue.⁸

I once heard this quote attributed to Martin Luther King, Jr.: “Church is not the place you come to, it’s the place you go from.”⁹ Now, in order to *go from* church, you *do* have to do *what*? You *do* have to *come to* church—so this quote doesn’t mean coming to church is not important. In fact, it’s *essential*. We have to come to church in order to encounter the Lord in a real way, be fed, nourished, and like Simon’s mother-in-law, we come to church in order for Jesus to grasp our hand and help us up. And then, like Jesus, we go out from church to extend

that helping hand to others; like Simon's mother-in-law, we are equipped to serve Jesus and others.

+++

About eight years ago, when I was a seminarian serving my internship year at St. Joseph in Vancouver, Washington, one of my regular ministries—one of my *favorite* ministries—was making visits to patients at the hospital one day a week. As I was growing in this ministry, the Lord began to reveal an image to me of what I was happening each week.

Before telling you about the image, first I'll say that, now that I'm a priest, almost all of my visits to the hospital are when I get called by someone. [This is also a reminder that if you or your loved one is in the hospital or another care facility, or ailing at home, please contact me and I'd be happy to come visit and offer Anointing of the Sick. The best way to reach me is by calling the Eastside Pastoral Care phone number, which is on the front of our Bulletin.] Again, as a priest, most of my hospital visits are to people who call me, and are in some way connected to the parish.

However, in my ministry that year as a seminarian, when I went to the hospital, I would receive a list of Catholic patients, and then I'd walk the halls, offering to pray with people and giving them Communion. None of the people I visited had called for me, nor were they expecting a minister from the church to come to them. So, it was a beautiful surprise for them.

Eventually, what I started to realize about the people I met was that they were not actively coming to the church building at that point in their life. When they were admitted to the hospital, they filled out on the form that they were Catholic, but most of them did not have a parish they belonged to or a church they were attending regularly. As I became more and more of this, I started to realize that, as a seminarian ministering at St. Joseph Church, a lot of my time

was spent at the church. And, most of the people that I met and ministered to were people who *came to* the church.

But, the hospital was different. It gave me the opportunity to *go to* a different group of people. People whom I would not otherwise meet. And, as I started to become more and more aware of that reality, I was even more grateful for this ministry. And, the image that I talked about earlier—the image that the Lord began to share with me was this: every time I got in the car, left the church, and started driving to the hospital, I envisioned that I was carrying the front wall of the church with me. That, for that day, the front wall and doors of St. Joseph Church were being temporarily relocated, and the hospital was now inside the church.

The people I was going to meet that day weren't planning on coming to church. Instead, in a spiritual—but very real—sense, I was bringing the church to them. And, everyone I met in that hospital that day got to go to church.

+++

My friends, *this* is what it means for church to be the place you *go from*. For church to be the place that, once you *come to it*, you then *take it with you* everywhere you go. Many of you do this as Communion Ministers to the Sick and Homebound. (If you're interested in helping with this ministry, please get in touch with Karen Hauser from our parish staff.)

But, we're all called to do this, not just those who go to visit the sick. We all know, meet, encounter many people each day. Some who go to church, some who don't. Some who have faith, some who don't. Some who know Jesus, some who don't.

Whatever our vocation, whatever our ministry, whatever our state in life—we're all called to recognize the freedom that we are given. We're all called to recognize the good we are equipped to do. Freedom to do good in service of Jesus and others.

And, wherever we go when we go from here, whomever we meet, we are called to recognize that we can bring Mary, Queen of Peace Church—we can bring Jesus—to others by the ways that we love and serve them.

¹ The series of healings extends from the Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time through the Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B): Mark 1:21-2:12

² Mark 2:17

³ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* 1505:

“Moved by so much suffering Christ not only allows himself to be touched by the sick, but he makes their miseries his own: ‘He took our infirmities and bore our diseases’ (Mt 8:17; cf. Isa 53:4). But he did not heal all the sick. His healings were signs of the coming of the Kingdom of God. They announced a more radical healing: the victory over sin and death through his Passover. On the cross Christ took upon himself the whole weight of evil and took away the ‘sin of the world’ (Jn 1:29; cf. Isa 53:4-6), of which illness is only a consequence. By his passion and death on the cross Christ has given a new meaning to suffering: it can henceforth configure us to him and unite us with his redemptive Passion.”

⁴ Mark 1:31

⁵ Bishop Daniel Mueggenborg, *Come Follow Me: Discipleship Reflections on the Sunday Gospel Readings for Liturgical Year B*

⁶ Montague Brown, “Freedom/License” from Catholic Education Resource Center

(www.catholiceducation.org/en/religion-and-philosophy/philosophy/freedom-license.html)

⁷ See Galatians 5:1: “For freedom Christ set us free; so stand firm and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery.” Also, see Galatians 5:13: “For you were called for freedom, brothers. But do not use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh; rather, serve one another through love.”

Also, see John 8:31-36:

“Jesus then said to those Jews who believed in him, ‘If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’ They answered him, ‘We are descendants of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How can you say, “You will become free”?’ Jesus answered them, ‘Amen, amen, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin. A slave does not remain in a household forever, but a son always remains. So if a son frees you, then you will truly be free.’”

⁸ Mark 1:29

⁹ Attribution made by Fr. Gregory Boyle, S.J., during *Laetare Speech* at University of Notre Dame Commencement, 21 May 2017 (www.youtube.com/watch?v=8eQsHEjRrY)