

Homily – 5th Sunday of Year B – February 4th 2018

Everybody has bad situations to deal with! We cope with them — until they start stringing together! The day starts with the toaster burning the bread! That you can handle! The oil light blinks as you drive to work! No problem! You're already scheduled for maintenance next week! You realize that you've forgotten your lunch and the vending machine is broken! Oh well! Then the boss demands you stay late to finish a project! Why me? Suddenly, you realize: you're angry! Then, traffic is at a standstill despite your late departure! Now the day has really gotten to you! You get home and find out that the cable TV is out! And after all that, the frozen pizza keeps you up! What a day! We all have them – periodically! But some people have them a lot!

Each of the figures the Scriptures today are having a challenging day! In the first reading, a frustrated Job has finally reached his limits! St. Paul in the second reading whines to the Corinthians about the self-imposed pressures of his ministry! And Jesus wants to be left alone after hours of curing people! Still, *faith* makes each of them “keep on keeping on,” just as it should for us! Tomorrow can be better!

But we all know, life can get to us! And today's readings help us to put life into perspective!

No one knows suffering firsthand like Job does! He's humanity's “Sufferer-in-Chief”! In the story, he loses his worldly wealth, his children, and his bodily health in a single day! Plus he has to contend with a less-than-supportive spouse and friends who are worse than no friends at all! Finally, there's God's relentless silence! It's tough to be *Job*! Contrary to the platitude, Job isn't patient at all about this! He laments bitterly, he wishes for death sincerely, and cries to heaven for justice!

Job is a folktale character! His purpose is to represent all of us in our time of misery! We need him in the Bible to speak for us when we find ourselves in that *sea* of misery that is human history! There's no escaping it in the Bible. And in life – even now!

Just read the daily papers – or listen to the news! No life, however privileged, gets an exemption from the “suffering clause”!

In the Gospel Peter's mother-in-law is suffering! She has a fever! Scholars suspect it's malaria, common around Galilee! Left untreated, she might die of it! After a day of teaching, Jesus hears about it – “immediately,” which is St. Mark's favorite word! And immediately he responds by lifting her up, cured! We know she's cured because she takes action immediately as well! She serves her guests; she's Jesus' very first *deacon*; serving others after being “raised up” by Jesus!

St. Mark takes us from the particular to the universal, which is how the gospel works! First a man and a woman are healed! Now the whole miserable world of Capernaum descends on Peter's house by nightfall!

It's been a long and busy day in Capernaum, but Jesus doesn't complain, or object! He just keeps on healing, delivering the Kingdom with every touch of his hand, every summons to a demon, every invitation to forgiveness!

Then, of course the next day everyone is looking for Jesus! No kidding! They're looking for him for relief from their particular misery! We don't blame them for wanting help! So do we! We all have our bad days, or our sad – “seasons” of life!

Yet it's important to remember an essential reality of human life! Jesus healed suffering people but he never cured suffering itself! Some suffering is inescapable! It seems that the very nature of life – in terms of its dynamics and growth guarantees some struggles! We're divine and animal; ... immortal and biodegradable; programmed for infinite possibilities; yet embodied in a very finite organism!

Rather than complain about our struggles the Scriptures today invite us to look for the *lesson* it's trying to teach us! Yes, look for the “lesson” that life (not necessarily God, per se, but that life) is *teaching* us! Depending on our outlook and expectations – suffering can crush us or make us whole!

As a church, we turn to various sacraments and sacramentals to remind us of Jesus's healing presence: We have the Sacrament of Reconciliation; today at the end of Mass we'll have the blessing of throats; Next weekend we'll have the Sacrament of The Sick for “World Day of Prayer For The Sick”! We have these sacraments to help us to cope and to strengthen our perseverance to “keep on keeping on” as best we can, with as much FAITH as we can muster – with God's grace!

Super Bowl Commercial – “We're All on One Team!”

Maybe at the moment – for some of us – life is going along pretty well! We're having a good day! Or, we're at the right spot! We're in a good or better space in life! That's great. We might not need at this moment to search diligently for Jesus! But we're here in church to strengthen the foundations of our faith and our relationship with God – for when the storms come!

But for the “Jobs” here in church today, perhaps you feel like the disciples who want to – desperately – search for and track God down wherever we can find the Lord!

*If you would, Lord:
calm the seas I sail,
still the waves that rock my boat,
and hush the winds that pull me off my course.*

*But let me not forget
that while you sometimes choose to calm the storm
you often let it rage and calm instead
the one who rides it out.*

God might not calm every storm in my life, but he'll always give me what I need to ride it out. That's why we keep on “keeping on” and coming back to church – in good times and bad; in sickness and in health