



Contributed by Father Raphael Ma, C.R.

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FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

February 7, 2021

GATHERING TIME

(10-15 Minutes)

Introduction to the Word:

Perhaps among most remarkable books ever written is Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning*. If you've never read it before, it's a rather gripping read. In my 2nd year of theology, I had a field placement teaching religion at a local Catholic high school. There were two grade 12 religion classes: world religions and philosophy. The philosophy class was reading the book, so I decided to read it along with them to join their discussion. I found myself imagining myself along there with Dr. Frankl as he described his experiences and those of his fellow prisoners.

Our first reading for the 5th Sunday of Ordinary Time is from the book of Job, another remarkable book on human suffering. While it is of a different style and genre compared to Viktor Frankl's book, I would say that the two are woven from the same cloth. Rather than trying to "solve" the problem of human suffering in the abstract, they instead take us right into another person's experience of suffering, and invite us to face God, and our own experiences of suffering along there with them.

One of the key insights of Viktor Frankl was that those who lost their sense of meaning, their hope, their reason for living, would in fact visibly decline, mentally and physically. However, those who held on to a sense of meaning, to whatever it was they hoped for, to whatever or whomever was their reason for living, remarkably managed to live through conditions we would think impossible for the human body to withstand.

While few of us would compare our present sufferings to the experience of life in a Nazi concentration camp, our suffering is still real, and the Word of God this week invites us to bring it before God, who gives us that meaning, that hope, and that reason for living that gives us life.

Warm-up Activity *(about 8-10 minutes):*

Some questions to reflect on by yourself or with a group:

1. What are the sufferings I am facing in my life right now?
2. What makes my life meaningful?
3. What am I hoping for?
4. What is/are my reason(s) for living?

The Table of the Word

If our First Reading was about suffering, then we could say our Second Reading and Gospel this Sunday are about mission. And the two are in fact related. In 1975, Pope St. Paul VI wrote an Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, which was a reflection of all that had been discussed at the Synod of Bishops the previous year, on the topic of evangelization.

The section from paragraphs 21 to 24, Paul VI sketches out the stages in which evangelization, the encounter with the Gospel, ordinarily occurs. Here's an excerpt:

"...Take a Christian or a handful of Christians who, in the midst of their own community, show their capacity for understanding and acceptance, their sharing of life and destiny with other people, their solidarity with the efforts of all for whatever is noble and good. Let us suppose that, in addition, they radiate in an altogether simple and unaffected way their faith in values that go beyond current values, and their hope in something that is not seen and that one would not dare to imagine. Through this wordless witness these Christians stir up irresistible questions in the hearts of those who see how they live: Why are they like this? Why do they live in this way? What or who is it that inspires them? Why are they in our midst? Such a witness is already a silent proclamation of the Good News and a very powerful and effective one. Here we have an initial act of evangelization."

While there are a whole number of ways and areas of life in which we can witness the Good News to others, I think the one which is the most compelling, and seems to have the most impact in real life, is in the area of suffering. When we are found to still have faith, hope, and love, in the midst of our own suffering or sharing in that of others, our life becomes an example of that "wordless witness" which Paul VI mentions, that initial act of evangelization that can give others a share in the hope God has given us.

Penitential Rite:

Leader: "Praise the Lord, who heals the brokenhearted."

Lord Jesus, you had compassion on the afflicted,

Lord Jesus, you lift us up and commission us to proclaim your Good News,

Lord Jesus, your mercies are new every morning,

Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Let us pray (together)

Keep your family safe, O Lord, with unfailing care, that, relying solely on the hope of heavenly grace, they may be defended always by your protection. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION TIME (45 minutes)

*(As Christians we believe that the **WORD** of God we hear proclaimed each Sunday is an empowering Word, and that God is present in the Word proclaimed. This is the Word that God wants us to hear today. The dynamic of the Small Christian Community, namely, reflecting on our life story within the context of this Word, and sharing the insights of these reflections, is such that God's Spirit becomes present, and the gifts of the Spirit are experienced as empowering and life-giving.)*

FIRST READING (Job 7:1-4, 6-7)

A reading from the book of Job.

Job spoke to his friends:

“Do not human beings have a hard service on earth,
and are not their days like the days of a labourer?

Like a slave who longs for the shadow,
and like labourers who look for their wages,
so I am allotted months of emptiness,
and nights of misery are apportioned to me.

“When I lie down I say, ‘When shall I rise?’

But the night is long,
and I am full of tossing until dawn.

“My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle,
and come to their end without hope.

Remember that my life is a breath;
my eye will never again see good.”

The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

SECOND READING (1 Corinthians 9:16-19, 22-23)

A reading from the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians.

If I proclaim the gospel, this gives me no ground for boasting,
for an obligation is laid on me,

and woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel!

For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward;

but if not of my own will, I am entrusted with a commission.

What then is my reward?

Just this:

that in my proclamation

I may make the gospel free of charge,

so as not to make full use of my rights in the gospel.

For though I am free with respect to all,

I have made myself a slave to all,

so that I might win more of them.

To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak.

I have become all things to all people,

that I might by all means save some.

I do it all for the sake of the gospel,

so that I may share in its blessings.

The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL (Mark 1:29-39)

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

As soon as Jesus and his disciples 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 Jesus 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.
That evening, at sundown,
they brought to Jesus 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.
In the morning, while it was still very dark,
Jesus got up and went out to a deserted place,
and there he prayed.
And Simon and his companions hunted for him.
When they found him, they said to him,
"Everyone is searching for you."
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 Jesus went through Galilee,
proclaiming the message in their synagogues
and casting out demons.
The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

<p>Lectio Divina means "sacred prayer through sacred reading." It was a popular form of prayer in the early Church. This Word proclaimed today is God's own Word, God's way of speaking to you today through God's own Spirit. So take a few moments to be quiet, allowing this Word you have just heard to touch you or soak into you as you reflect quietly on the three readings. Is there a word or thought that somehow attracts you or has your interest? If so, simply identify it and describe it in a few words.</p>
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COMMENTARY:

First Reading:

In the opening chapters of the book of Job, Job's three friends hear about the tragic events that befell Job, and they go in hopes of comforting and consoling him. But upon seeing him, we are told they sat with him on the ground for seven days and seven nights in a respectful silence, because they saw Job's suffering was very great. Job finally breaks the silence with a lament, and the first of his friends makes a reply.

Job's first friend, Eliphaz, tells Job to consider the bigger picture, there is a past and a future outside his suffering, and also reminds Job of the power of prayer. But in the text of our first reading, Job responds

by talking about his suffering using time words like as “days,” “months,” and “nights.” Although Eliphaz tried to tell him to consider of the other parts of his life outside of the suffering, Job is saying that his suffering envelops it all, there is no part of his life outside his suffering– his whole life seems like hard labour, misery, and emptiness.

The book of Job is also rich in its poetic imagery. The image at the end of our first reading, of the weaver’s shuttle, is a rich one. Like a weaver’s shuttle moving rapidly through the loom, Job’s days seems to pass quickly. And in Hebrew, the word for thread and the word for hope sound similar, and so there is a play on words in the following line, that just as the weaver’s shuttle stops its motion and is left empty when it runs out of thread, Job’s days seem to end empty without hope.

Second Reading:

Our Second Reading comes right after St. Paul’s answer to the Christians in Corinth’s question about eating food offered to idols. This was a real problem in those days, since many events such as civil celebrations or athletic events began with sacrifices offered to the gods, the leftovers of which (often meat, which poor people might not otherwise be able to afford) would be offered to people as food. People would also take this food home, and possibly serve it to their guests. If Christians ate that food, would that mean they were participating in the sacrifices offered to those idols?

St. Paul’s response to this problem was to recognize that yes, it’s just food and Christians have a right to eat the food like everyone else, but they should be careful of how they exercise their rights, since “weaker” Christians, those who do not understand this so clearly, might misunderstand and think that since the “stronger” Christians are eating food offered to idols, it must be ok to continue participating in those sacrifices.

And it is in light of this that in our Second Reading, St. Paul is giving his own example of how he is not using his rights: although he is an Apostle and has a right to remuneration for his preaching – he chooses not to make use of this right – for the sake of the Gospel that he is preaching, to make it more available. And really, he is willing to give up anything in order to reach as many people as possible. So too the Christians in Corinth should not just focus on what is their right, but to consider what is best for the spreading of the Gospel.

Gospel:

In our Gospel, St. Peter’s mother in law is healed and “lifted up” from her suffering by Jesus. And we hear the very next thing she does is to “serve” those present. But perhaps we don’t realize that she continued to serve by making her home available – we are not told that Jesus went anywhere else that day, so we may assume that he remained right there at St. Peter’s house, and a large crowd has gathered – “the whole city”! That must have been a lot of work and inconvenience. But the joy of being “lifted up” by Jesus would have been the source of that joyful service. Similarly, when Jesus “lifts” us up from our suffering, Christians are moved out of gratitude to joyful service.

Both Jesus’ not permitting the demons to speak as he cast them out, as well as the disciples’ remark “Everyone is searching for you” reveal a lack of understanding of who Jesus is and why he has come. Jesus does not permit the demons to speak, because they will identify him as the Messiah, something which at this point, people are going to misunderstand. And the disciples seem to be focused on making Jesus’ healing power available to the people who have come to see Jesus. However, while Jesus has compassion on the crowds and heals many, Jesus’ healings are still signs of something still greater, what he has come do. And it is not limited to just one place. Again, a sense of mission.

Allow 5 – 10 minutes for the participants to react to the **Commentary** to identify a newly discovered insight.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION:

1. Do you identify at all with Job's description of his suffering in our first reading?
2. Are you foregoing things you have a right to so that others may better encounter the Gospel?
3. How has Jesus lifted you up in your life?
4. Where are the places in your life that you think Jesus is sending you to bring the Gospel?

CARING-PRAYING TIME: (15-20 minutes)

*(This time is reserved for quiet prayer as well as for an action-response to the communal reflections. The intent is to 'outreach' to the larger community. The facilitator should allow for a **moderate pause** between each of the suggestions for reflection and action.)*

1. **Word of the Week:** "...He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up."
2. **Suggestion for the Week:** Reach out to one or two people this week who you think might be suffering and in need of some encouragement and hope.
3. **Intercessions:** (Response: **Lord, hear our prayer**)

We bring our prayers and petitions to God, who heals the brokenhearted.

That the Church will be an instrument of Christ's healing and liberation, we pray the Lord.

That those who suffer, whether physically or mentally or both, may be lifted up, we pray to the Lord. For those who are serving others during this pandemic, that they may be strengthened, we pray to the Lord.

For a deeper experience of the Good News of the Gospel and a desire to share it, we pray to the Lord.

For those who have died, that they may enter into rest, we pray to the Lord.

How can we help you in prayer this week?

Let us pray (together)

O God, who have willed that we be partakers
in the one Bread and the one Chalice,
grant us, we pray, so to live
that, made one in Christ,
we may joyfully bear fruit
for the salvation of the world. Amen.

With hands and hearts united in gratitude for God's favours today, we pray that all those in our influence be moved to be open to your Word and your Spirit, while we pray as one, OUR FATHER

Celebrating the Word, Resurrection Ministries of the Congregation of the Resurrection Ontario-Kentucky Province (including the former Resurrection Centre), 265 Westmount Road North, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada N2L 3G7. (Celebrating the Word was founded by Father Frank Ruetz, C.R. deceased 2012). For information:

website: www.resurrectionists.ca **Email:** provincialoffice@resurrectioncollege.ca The Scripture version used in this commentary is the New Revised Standard Version (copyrighted by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA).