

Sexagesima - Ordinary Sunday 5B

Last Sunday's Gospel described the first blow that Jesus struck against the rule of Satan in the world: his teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum in the course of which he dramatically frees a man possessed by an evil spirit, with power and authority (Mark 1:21-28). Today's Gospel (Mark 1:29-39) continues the account of that inaugural day of Jesus' ministry. Leaving the synagogue, Jesus goes to Simon Peter's house and cures Simon's mother-in-law, who is ill with a fever. He then extends his healing and liberating activity to the whole town, as he leaves Capernaum for neighbouring towns to extend his mission on a wider scale.

This gospel text is an icon that reveals us a typical day of Jesus, which emphasises three important aspects of Jesus. Prayer – Healing/Service – Evangelisation.

Accordingly, the first thing Jesus does in the morning, long before dawn, is that he gets up and leaves the house for a lonely place and prays. Jesus Prayed! The Son of God, the Messiah, the Holy One of God, the Lord of Lord, the King of Kings prayed almost every morning. We also heard in our gospel that Jesus was in the synagogue; so Jesus went to Church if you like. At the synagogue he listened to the Word of God, then worshiped with his community. So Jesus prayed daily and went to Church weekly. Sounds familiar? This is why the Church encourages Christians to do the same, to pray daily and at least once a week worship with the community.

Therefore, if a Christian, no matter how much theology he or she reads or understands, does not pray, he is only fooling himself. Prayer is the foundation of our faith and it is our living and committed relationship with God.

It is important to start our day with a time of prayer. For some of us, morning prayer is possible in a chapel, for some we can pray at our homes before

we start our day, for some it could even be in the car as we drive to work or school or Uni. It does not matter how we pray or what sort of prayer we use, the important thing is that we pray; *Pray to develop our relationship with God, Pray to listen to his Word and be inspired by his Holy Spirit.* Unless we pray we will not be successful in the Spiritual Life. Period.

Following the example of Jesus, his body the Church exists first to pray to the Father. The more the Church prays, she will be the Church Jesus wants her to be. Prayer includes both private and public worship, private meditation or contemplative prayer, prayer through song, praying the scriptures, the Rosary, and the liturgy as the formal public prayer of the Church, and of course the Holy Mass, the most privileged source and summit of the Church's prayer. We have built Churches and Chapels all around the world for two thousand years firstly as places of public worship and prayer; sacred spaces are meant to help us pray, raise our hearts and minds to God and help us perform prayers of blessings, and adoration, prayers of petition or intercession, prayers of thanksgiving and prayers of praise and worship.

Secondly, we hear what Jesus does as a fruit of his life of prayer. He heals. He prays and then he heals all sorts of human suffering. With the Sabbath ended at sundown, the townsfolk are free to bring their sick and tormented for healing. *There is no good reason to suppose that the Galilean towns and villages where Jesus laboured were any more prone to cases of true demonic possession than is the case today.* The Gospel highlights the demonic, not only because its author has attributed many more conditions to that cause than we would, but also out of the desire to portray all Jesus' activity – whether teaching, healing or exorcising/casting out demons– as a life-and-death struggle with the powers opposed to God, for the freedom and enhancement of human life.

Jesus healed physical illnesses, psychological illnesses and spiritual illnesses and still heals today by the way. *The healing ministry of Jesus further includes all aspects of Christian service and charity.* Wherever there are human needs and suffering, in body, mind or spirit, whether in hospitals or other medical services, in refugee camps, war torn places of our world, and various other service contexts, **Jesus still wants to heal and serve through his church, his body.** So the Church after the example of Jesus has set up numerous hospitals and health institutions to heal the sick, together with her sacraments and prayer. **The church firstly prays and then serves, heals.**

A good way to measure the quality of our prayer is to check our levels of service. If we pray to the God of love and mercy, to Christ who came to serve and heal, we will be empowered by the Holy Spirit to serve, to love, to heal in various ways, based on the gifts given us by God. We do not have to go too far to see human needs in our world, ask God in your prayer where he wants you to serve the needs of others.

Next, we see, Jesus not only Prays and Heals he also Evangelises. From the family of Simon and the afflicted people of Capernaum, Jesus moves on ‘to the neighbouring towns’ because as he says, ‘It is for this that I came out’ – came out from Nazareth but ‘came out’ more radically as the Son of God to confront and overcome the evil of the world by preaching the Good News.

Jesus did not just pray and had a personal relationship with his Father. So we can never say it’s just between myself and God. Private Christianity is not biblical. We can’t neither say it’s all about just serving the poor and the needy of our world, that’s secular just social services which only address the material needs of humanity. How about people’s spiritual needs? How about the fate of their eternal souls? **Jesus prayed, he preached, and he evangelised.** He went to as many towns as he could go. The church also exists to evangelise. The church

invested in education primarily to evangelise. *So the Church built churches to pray, hospitals to heal and schools to evangelise, following the daily routine of Jesus.* However, we know many of these institutions are failing in their original purposes.

We heard in the epistle, St. Paul saying “Woe to me if I do not preach 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” – Not just priests and the religious have this commission to preach, but all baptised Christians. I know the world tells us ‘not preach’ but the Bible tells us woe to me if I do not preach! - of Course we preach with sensitivity, empathy and truth in love, through both our actions and words, but we need to preach, we need to evangelise. When was the last time we invited someone to come to Church? Or spoke about faith? After Easter we are planning an Alpha course to outreach to the community with faith and hospitality. I invite all of us to think of someone to invite to do this introductory course on Christianity. We need to reach out.

And finally a word on healing the mother in law of Simon. The language in which the healing action of Jesus is described, ‘He came and took her by the hand and raised her up’ echoes the language of resurrection. The fever left her and she was completely restored to health, and she began to wait on them, to serve them. Simon’s mother-in-law thus anticipates the ministry that disciples who have experienced the healing and reconciling power of Jesus will go on to exercise in his name, they will serve in their turn. **We too, sometimes come to mass poor, sick, and troubled, much like the people who came for healing at Peter’s house.** In this Mass let us express our needs to Jesus. Let us ask him to take us by the hand and help us as he helped Simon’s mother-in-law. Then with our spirits uplifted, we will be able to pray and worship, and serve and heal and go out from Mass with a renewed desire to share the faith with others.