

FIFTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

Mark 1:29-39

Our Scripture passage for this Sunday comes from the Gospel of Mark 1:29- 39. In this text we read of Jesus going to the home of Simon Peter and healing his mother-in-law. This passage is a wonderful instruction for us as disciples so that we can experience and respond to the Lord's grace in our lives with fidelity and generosity.

It is significant that Jesus heals Simon Peter's mother-in-law by grasping her hand. Mark goes out of his way to tell us about Jesus touching her. That is because it went against the social norms in the time of Jesus for a man to interact in this way with a woman who was not his relative. Jesus is showing us by His action that the Good News He brings to the world will challenge some of our social conventions and that being a Christian may mean going against certain cultural practices. Sometimes our love for God and neighbor calls us to act in unconventional and even shocking ways. This is a common theme in the Gospels. Christian disciples cannot allow their lives to be governed by the expectations of society, culture, or other people. Rather, a Christian disciple must be prepared to do whatever is necessary to manifest the love of God in specific times and place-even if it goes against the expectations of others.

- *What are some of the social norms or cultural expectations that deter disciples from expressing their faith today?*
- *Who is someone you respect because he or she practices their faith without being restrained by expectations?*
- *When have you avoided compassionate action because you were uncomfortable but through which you could have brought the mercy, acceptance, or healing of God to someone?*

There is a striking contrast between the healing of Simon Peter's mother-in-law and the healing of the crowds. It is worth studying this contrast because Mark is intentional in presenting it to us. After her healing, we are told that Simon Peter's mother-in-law began to serve Jesus and the disciples. This action is significant because it means she used her gift of healing for the purpose of ministry. It is further significant as a reminder we all have received gifts from God's generous mercy, although we don't all respond as faithfully and generously and she did. 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. Thus, Simon Peter's mother-in-law represents the ideal disciple when she serves others (see Mk 10:43). Also, this passage is more than just a story about physical healing. On a deeper level it is an instruction on how to live our Baptism. This additional element is introduced when we are told that Jesus "raised" her up. The word used for "raised" (Greek: *egeiren*) is the same term used in reference to the Resurrection of Jesus Himself (see 1 Cor 15:4, Gal 1:1, Rom 4:24, Acts 3:15, 4:10). Thus, we see Jesus sharing His resurrected life with her by "raising" her and then we are told how she responds by demonstrating into a relationship of service for Jesus and those who follow Him (the Church). This deeper understanding of the passage challenges us to share the gift of God's life with others through works of charity and faithful service for the mission of the Gospel. According to this interpretation, Jesus and His first disciples represent the beginnings of the Church, and Simon Peter's mother-in-

law exemplifies an aspect of pastoral ministry in caring for the members of the Church.

- *How has God blessed you, and how have you used those blessings to serve the Lord?*
- *What is the difference between the missionary and the pastoral ministries of the Church, and how can you use your gifts to participate in each of those ministries?*
- *What can a faith community do to help people become more engaged in tire pastoral ministries of the Church?*

The next scene of Jesus healing the crowds that come to Him ends quite differently. We are told that the Lord healed all who were ill and cast out many demons, but we are not told that anyone used their gift of healing to serve Him in return. Rather, the implication is that they took their gifts of healing and went home. What a stark contrast in response from that of Simon Peter's mother-in-law. The crowds would seek Jesus only when they needed something from Him but not because they wanted to place their lives (which He had restored) in His service. When the disciples report to Jesus that the townspeople are looking for Him, the implication is either that they wanted more miracles or that they wanted to keep the Lord in their town. Jesus refuses to reduce His ministry to that of a local miracle worker who is there to only solve people's physical problems. Rather, His mission is to make disciples—people who will accept the Kingdom of God and follow Him with lives committed to love of God and neighbor. Such a mission could not be fulfilled for people who were only interested in what God could do for them but not interested in what they could do for God. Jesus left that town to continue His ministry of preaching and healing elsewhere. The crowd's lack of sufficient response challenges us to reflect on the ways in which we have been self-centered or selfish in our response to God's grace in our lives. It also invites us to reflect on why we follow Jesus.

- *What happens to our faith when we think that God exists only to take away our problems?*
- *How have you been tempted to use God's blessings in your life for your own needs rather than in the service of the Gospel?*
- *In what way do you think the crowds understood the meaning of "discipleship"?*
- *As you think about this passage in its entirety, what is the enduring lesson you will take from it?*