

The Catholic Parish of Petworth & Midhurst West Sussex

Fr Peter's Homily for The Fifth Sunday of Ordinary Time (Year B)
Sunday 7th February 2021

The Book of Job is beautiful poetry, but perhaps not the most cheerful read. In today's passage he speaks for us all as he voices 'lockdown fatigue'! Everything seems dreary to him; everything is joyless. He spends his nights unable to sleep, longing for the day to come; then the tedium of the days leaves him anxious, restless and fretful longing for the night to fall. It seems that there is no end to it all. Written thousands of years ago, it could have been meant for 2021. Job's world has collapsed. Everything that he thought was certain has disintegrated, all the markers that he used to navigate his way through life have disappeared, so all he can do is sit in the dust and feel miserable. What seemed solid has fallen apart and he can see no way for it to be put back together again.

But then we read the Gospel, which again follows on immediately from last Sunday, where Jesus was teaching and healing in the synagogue at Capernaum. We read them split up week by week, but they form part of a breathless narrative, a story in which Jesus moves from one activity to the next with scarcely any space between them. There is no time to lose! In the synagogue at Capernaum he preached to the gathered people, and they were amazed at the authority with which he spoke. He pulled together the scriptures for them and helped them to see a bigger picture, helped them to see how the ancient scriptures and their lives of today fit together; everything fell into place, and they were amazed. Then he healed a man possessed and put his life back together for him, so that a life which had been all topsy turvy was now all back in order again. After that he goes to the house of Simon and Andrew, where Simon's mother-in-law is sick, and he heals her so that the shaken up household is made whole again. Then all the sick of the district are brought to him, and again he takes those lives that are damaged and disordered, and he reassembles them as they were intended to be once again. Through his words and his actions he takes all the jumbled up pieces of the jigsaw that is people's broken, damaged lives, and reassembles them as they were meant to be.

Once all the reassembling is done, Jesus rests and then, drained from all the energy he has put into restoring bodies, minds and souls, he spends time with his Father. This is still not enough for the people: they are intrigued, fascinated by this man, they want to hear more and so when his new companions find him they say 'everybody is looking for you'. But he doesn't say 'OK, lets go and talk to them some more'. The people in Capernaum have already received what he came to give. They have been given a glimpse of how to shake up and reassemble life, and now it is over to them. He has shown them how to put life back together again, now it is over to them. So he says 'Let us go elsewhere...that is why I came'. He came to visit town after town, and do the same thing in each: to help people see the ways in which their lives have become disordered, confused and jumbled up, so that they can put them back together again.

The Gospel passage today shows us Jesus doing exactly what the Father has sent him to do: bringing the clarity of human life lived to the full into a world of confusion, disease, turmoil and ignorance, and helping people to reassemble their lives in a way that makes sense. Whereas some people go through life bringing confusion and turmoil, Jesus passes through the towns and villages putting people back together again. Faced with Job's paralysed inability to engage with a world that seems to have turned against him, Jesus' response is to enter that world himself, and enter into its pain and its suffering himself, so that they can be defeated once and for all. He wants to enter our difficult circumstances, too. He chooses us to be the messengers, as once he chose his first disciples; to be a presence of calm and hope and community in a tired and anxious world. He chooses us to be the ones who, whenever we are confronted by discord, and anger, and confusion, and just the sense of being lost and bewildered, will not have the answers to all this, but will know just the place to take the problems. Listening to peoples' fears and anxieties we can be a presence that is calm, because we know that in the long run all will be well; people do not expect us to have the answers to all their problems, but they are very grateful to know that there is something that can never be lost, or destroyed, or alienated, and that is the timeless love of God. This is the touchstone that turns chaos into order and rebuilds lives paralysed by anxiety. Today, tomorrow, next month, next year, things may indeed be difficult: but in the long run, all will be well.