

5TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

The first reading of today is taken from the Book of Job.

We all know the story of Job very well. The Book tells the story of a rich man whom God allows to be tested by Satan to see if he will remain faithful even under severe duress. In a series of disasters; his flocks, his wealth, even his children are all destroyed.

He himself is then brought low by a repulsive painful disease. He naturally wonders why all this has happened to him and cries out to God.

His wife pushes him from the start to curse God but he will not. Four friends then come to counsel him, offering the basic belief of their then prevailing theology that God always rewards the just and punishes evil. It is sinners only who suffer. Each of them tries to get Job to admit that he is a great sinner but Job answers each of his friends asserting his innocence.

In today's reading he is answering the first friend and having declared his innocence he admits the severity of the trials by which he is afflicted.

He compares his life to the three most wretched states of life then known—those in a compulsory enrolment for service, the hired servant and slave.

Is not man's life on earth a drudgery? Are not his days those of a hireling? He is a slave who longs for the shade, a hireling who waits for his wages.

The point is Job in the first reading is reflecting on the miseries or bitterness of life. His crisis seems to make him realize, perhaps for the first time, that there is real, innocent suffering in life and that one's lot in life does not depend on righteousness or what one deserves. This is the test of his faith.

As human beings from time to time we find ourselves in some miserable situations. We feel and experience pain. In bed, because of one or two troubles; it could be sickness, job loss, lack of money, troublesome husband, rowdy wife, disobedient children, you name it, the night drags on. In worst situations we become depressed and lose hope and peace.

In such situations let remember what the psalmist tells us today; the Lord heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.

That is what Jesus is about in his ministry. In the gospel reading we see Jesus curing Simon's mother-in-law of a fever and working many miracles of healing.

It is not just that Jesus cured Simon's mother-in-law or the concourse of patients and other sick people during his life on earth. It is that by his death on the cross in whose benefits we partake in every Eucharist, he continues to heal the brokenhearted, the sick and the afflicted.

Jesus continues to heal us whenever we partake in the Eucharist. We are touched by him when we partake in the Eucharist.

We may not always see the physical healing but with good disposition towards the reception of this sacrament and other sacraments, Jesus restores us to a full and proper relationship with God the Father, with our neighbor and within ourselves. This is the first healing we must always pray for.

And like St Paul in the second reading let us, as it were, preach the gospel by helping those who are brokenhearted know that even in their difficulties Jesus is at their side to save them. Let us encourage and console those who are overburdened with one or two problems to bear them with courage. We should not discourage them as the friends of Job did.