

5th Sunday Ordinary Time February 4, 2018 St. Agnes Church

In the late spring of 1968,
 as the population in Southern Nigeria was decimated by famine,
 the French Red Cross issued an appeal for volunteers.
 A group of young doctors from France decided to go
 and help provide emergency aid.
 Because of its success
 this group expanded and later became known as “Doctors Without Borders”.

Recently, there was a TV segment on some of the current work
 being done by “Doctors Without Borders”.
 A team of doctors, nurses and technicians
 traveled to a remote village in a 3rd world country.
 Their mission was to provide surgery
 to repair the condition of a cleft palate in children.
 People lined up bringing their children, hundreds of them.
 The sad part was that there was not enough time
 to take care of everyone.
 The team had to screen all comers
 and only a small number of children got the surgery
 they needed and wanted.

Was the mission a failure because of this limitation of time? Certainly not!
 I have no doubt that if the doctors were to return
 to this same village in a year,
 the lines would be twice as long.
 Parents were probably upset
 that their sons or daughters were not chosen
 as a candidates for surgery.
 But I cannot see any of them being ungrateful
 regarding the presence of these doctors and nurses.
 The opportunity for a normal life for their children
 was beyond their imagination,
 until the day the medical team arrived.

Today’s Gospel tells of a similar situation.
 Jesus is doing Peter “a solid”
 by coming to his home and healing his mother-in-law.
 Word spreads of Jesus’ presence
 and his power to heal the sick and to cast out evil spirits.
 People came from miles around and lined up at the door.
 Jesus worked well into the evening.
 He finally had to close up shop for the day.
 People who were sick and plagued by evil spirits
 waited outside the door through the night.

Jesus exits the house under the cover of darkness
 so he could have some time in communion with the Father.
 In the morning his disciples found him
 and urged him to return to the city
 for there were many people wanting to be helped.
 Knowing what he needed to accomplish,
 Jesus chooses to move on to other parts of the region.
 As a result,
 many expectant people were left disappointed.

Was Jesus' mission that day in the city of Capernaum a failure? Certainly not!
 Countless people were healed.
 Countless people were liberated from evil.
 I'm sure the people left behind did **not** say
 "Oh, that Jesus. He lacks compassion.
 He lacks sensitivity.
 He was selfish in leaving us without finishing all the work."
 They probably said "where did he go.
 We want to seek him out."
 One point here
 is that faith isn't always getting what we want.
 It's believing that in God
 a better spiritual future can be had
 and then acting accordingly.

Another point can be made
 as far as life in general.
 Sometimes the work at hand
 is beyond our capacity to complete.
 We live under time constraints.
 Just because we don't complete everything that needs to be done,
 doesn't mean we are failures. It means we're human.
 I can hear the school children already
 "Msgr. Don said we didn't have to do all of our homework."

There's a third point.
 People were healed and freed from evil.
 By the hand of Jesus miracles took place.
 These people were given new life through Jesus.
 Receiving new life through the intervention of Jesus
 is a great good.
 Such gestures showed his power over sickness and evil.
 But we learn as the story of Jesus progresses
 that he does much greater things than this. His message is more than this.
 There is more to what God is about. There is more to be gained.
 We learn that life "through" Jesus isn't the same as life "in" Jesus.
 New life "in" Jesus Christ is the good news of salvation.
 To put it another way: what parent is only concerned about
 caring for a sick child and protecting the child from harm?
 There's much more to parenting than this.

New life that is given “through” Jesus
 occurs on the natural level.
 Freed from sickness and evil spirits,
 a person’s life returns to normal, per se.
 Something is taken away but nothing is added beyond that.

The life that we want is new life “in” Jesus.
 This occurs on a spiritual level,
 on a supernatural level.
 Jesus offers a “newness” of life that is not just a return to a normal life.
 In Him we are made new creations.
 We are given being in Christ which is eternal.
 Yes, it is “...similar to life in the world
 but it is a life lived in accordance with the beatitudes...”

The invitation of Jesus
 is into a life that extends beyond our earthly existence,
 beyond earthly dimensions
 ...a life that finds its fullness
 in the promised age to come.
 Jesus, after all, is the Son of God.

This new life “in” Christ (and not just “through” Christ)
 has its demands,
 demands that involve self-denial
 but also the experience of joy.
 This new life entails personal moral commitments
 in keeping with the Gospel
 (as in “I will chose what is right, avoid what is wrong”).
 It involves adopting Christian attitudes
 and the living of Christian virtues.
 It includes the endeavor to educate our faith.
 This new life in Christ has social consequences.
 We have an obligation to clarify properly the realities that surround us:
 our human activity,
 our freedom,
 the search for and the building up of a society
 where we stand together in love,
 we work for justice
 and conduct our affairs so as to live in peace.

The mission of Jesus Christ was and continues to be
 the proclamation of the Kingdom of God...
 announcing to the world that the Kingdom of God is at hand,
 it is within human reach.
 It is within our reach.

Today’s prayer: “O Lord, heal our sicknesses, free us from what is evil, but most importantly,
 draw us more fully into the life of Your Son Jesus Christ. Continue to instruct and train our
 souls in the way of salvation. Amen!”