

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

If we were asked where our faith in Jesus began, who influenced us most to become believers, I wonder what we would say? Many of us would probably say that it was within our own homes that we learnt to believe. Many would name our parents or grandparents as the ones who influenced us the most. I find it interesting that in Mark's gospel Jesus quickly moves his healing and preaching ministry from the synagogue to the home of the first men who were called to follow him. Peter and Andrew, James and John are the first witnesses to the "Works of Power" as Mark calls the miracles of Jesus.

When Jesus goes to the house of Simon and Andrew they tell him about Simon's mother in law being sick. They may not have expected him to do anything about it, but rather were offering an apology for her lack of hospitality. But Jesus does do something about it. He goes into the more private part of the house and cures her. Mark tells us that he takes her by the hand and raises her up. Mark uses very similar words to describe the raising up of the daughter of Jairus, the synagogue official. There are eight healing narratives in Mark's Gospel, four of them are in favour of women. As a sign that Simon's mother in law has been restored to health she begins to wait upon them. Mark uses the word diakonein: to serve. It is the same word that Jesus uses to describe his own mission. "The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many." We find it again when the women who stood at the foot of the cross are described. They were those "who followed him and served him." When we see that word used of women right at the beginning and end of the ministry of Jesus, it is an indication that women disciples were called to share in the ministry of Jesus and to serve alongside of men in that ministry.

Something else was happening here too. The movement of the story of the first day of Jesus' ministry is from the synagogue into an ordinary family home. This reflects what was happening to the earliest Christian communities. For the first four centuries of the Church it was in the homes of believers that the life and ministry of Jesus was remembered and made present as they celebrated the

Eucharist. The ordinary family home was the centre of worship for the disciples of Jesus rather than the synagogue or the temple. And it is happening here already in the gospel. People come to faith in Jesus as he overpowers the evil of sickness in Peter's mother in law in her own home. And people then crowd around the door of the house to experience the healing ministry of Jesus. It is as if it flows out of the house. Perhaps that can speak to us of how when we gather for Eucharist we are not only healed ourselves, but that healing is meant to be flowing out the door through us to those others out there whose lives we touch. We are sometimes dismissed with the words, "Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life."

What Jesus does here in Andrew and Peter's home can also remind us of what Jesus longs to do in every home. When we welcome Jesus into our homes and share with him what is happening there, then he is given permission to go to those more private parts of our homes and of our lives to take us by the hand and raise us up too. We invite Jesus to sit at table with us when we pray a simple grace. We invite Jesus to stay with us when we speak to him first thing in the morning and last thing at night. We invite Jesus to bless our children and grandchildren when we pray with them. When we do this we are not only teaching them about Jesus but we are giving them an experience of his life and love.

The way in which children in our parish are prepared to celebrate the Sacraments of Confirmation and Holy Communion reflects our belief that the home is the best place for children come to know Jesus. Parents today prepare their own children for these sacraments with the support of the parish and school communities. Families are given the resources to learn and to pray with their children

When we look back to the gospel and see all those people crowding around the door we see Jesus is in danger there. He is in danger of getting too popular. He is danger of being misunderstood. He does not allow the devils that he was casting out to speak, because we are told "they knew who he was". We will see this often in Mark's gospel.

Jesus was in danger of becoming so popular that he would not be able to fulfil the mission that had been given to him by his Father. We are told in today's gospel that he got up long before dawn and went to a lonely place to pray. So often in the Scriptures the desert or the wilderness is the place where people encounter God. Jesus needed to refocus on what his father wanted him to do. When Peter and the others found him, he told them that he could not go back to Capernaum. He needed to move on. "Let us go elsewhere, to the neighbouring country towns so that I can preach there too, because that is why I came."

You and I need to refocus on what God calls us to do too. That is what prayer does for us. It gives God time to remind us of what is important and what is not. Prayer gives God time to remind us of who we are. Prayer gives God time to remind us of how loved we are.