

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Of the things that we have missed during the Pandemic, perhaps the freedom to use the sense of touch has been the most telling. Touch is the only sense that cannot be experienced virtually.

In today's gospel we see Jesus using the sense of touch to heal Peter's mother-in-law. Mark tells us that Jesus 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. Jesus put himself at risk of becoming contaminated by this ill woman and becoming unclean. But he doesn't catch her illness. She catches his wholeness.

Perhaps we have never noticed that before. Perhaps it is only now that we have needed to reflect upon the gift of touch. Among the things that Pope Francis said last week about the Word of God was that a passage from the Scripture, heard many times already, unexpectedly will speak to a person one day, and enlighten a situation that they are living, offering fresh insights and often challenging our habitual way of thinking about and seeing the world.

This weekend we are celebrating the Sunday of the Word of God. At his recent General Audience Pope Francis said some rather wonderful things about the

Word of God. "The words of the Sacred Scripture were not written to remain imprisoned on papyrus, parchment or paper, but to be received by a person who prays, making them blossom in his or her heart."

Perhaps today we can be thinking and praying about the role of women in the Church. When Peter's mother-in-law had been healed, she begins to wait upon those in the house. 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 a pretty clear indication that women disciples were called to share in the ministry of Jesus and to serve alongside of men in that ministry.

That the ministry of Jesus begins in a home and then moves out to touch those who crowded around the door may say something to us about our ministry today. It always has to begin where we are at home with Jesus. It can only move out to others from there. It is here at the Eucharist that we gather for our family meal. 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.

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 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. It is the best way to help them to come to know Jesus.

At his General Audience Pope Francis talked about praying with the Scriptures. "Through prayer a new incarnation of the Word takes place. And we are the 'tabernacles' where the words of God want to be welcomed and preserved, so that they may visit the world." But praying with the Scriptures demands a generous openness to what Jesus might be saying to us there. "The believer does not turn to the Holy Scriptures to support his or her own philosophical and moral view, but because he or she hopes for an encounter; the believer knows that The Scriptures were written in the Holy Spirit."

Pope Francis then spoke about the rich tradition in the Church of praying with the Scriptures. He invited us to draw on the monastic tradition of Lectio Divina. In this way of praying "One enters into dialogue with Scripture, so that those words become a cause for meditation and prayer," while also asking what it "says to me". The last step of Lectio Divina, explained the Pope, is contemplation. "Words and thoughts give way here to love."

We are told in today's gospel that Jesus got up long before dawn and went to a lonely place to pray. We are not told how he prayed, but I suspect that he would have drawn upon the Hebrew Scriptures to help him 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 Capernaun. 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."

Praying with God's Word, helps us all 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 how loved we are. Pope Francis concluded his Audience by reminding us that God's Word is a love letter, written to us by the One who knows us best."