

5 OT Year B Readings and Commentary

Summary by Dale J. Sieverding: The Christian Community is compelled to tell the story of Jesus Christ. Conforming our lives to God's will is not one option among many; it is the only option for those who follow Christ. The gospel story, indeed, indicates that the Christian life (here given voice in the life and times of Jesus) should do anything but let us 'get comfortable.' Jesus, having healed the sick and consoled the masses, could have remained where he experienced a little bit of success. Instead, he *moves on*, to a new frontier, expands his horizons to preach the message of forgiveness and peace in another place and time. He is the itinerant messenger of the Lord, who doesn't care how much trouble he stirs up. He is unrelenting in spreading the message as far and wide as possible, to create the most discomfort so that people 'wake up' and smell the rose of life with and in God.

© 2003, OCP. All rights reserved.

First Reading Job 7:1-4, 6-7

A reading from the Book of Job

Job spoke, saying:

Is not man's life on earth a drudgery?
Are not his days those of hirelings?
He is a slave who longs for the shade,
a hireling who waits for his wages.
So I have been assigned months of misery,
and troubled nights have been allotted to me.
If in bed I say, "When shall I arise?"
then the night drags on;
I am filled with restlessness until the dawn.
My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle;
they come to an end without hope.
Remember that my life is like the wind;
I shall not see happiness again.

The word of the Lord.

Commentary Job 7:1-4, 6-7 by John Paul Heil: Main Theme: The shortness of our lives can make us restless, hopeless, and unhappy. This reading from the wisdom tradition in the Book of Job expresses feelings that we human beings may often experience during the shortness of our time on earth. We may feel that we just don't have enough time to accomplish all that we would like to accomplish, so that we try to work as hard as possible and often try to do too much. Such a life can seem like sheer drudgery, as if we are merely slaves or hirelings working for our wages. Such a life can also be filled with sleepless nights, as we anguish over our lack of time--"I am filled with restlessness until the dawn." So quickly do our days go by--"swifter than a weaver's shuttle" and "like the wind"--that they seem to be without happiness or hope. In today's Gospel reading, meant to accompany this reading from Job, Jesus illustrates how to restore happiness and hope to our lives by making good use of the time God has given us to

work for his kingdom: "Rising very early before dawn, he left and went off to a deserted place, where he prayed." In the midst of all of the healing and preaching activity that Jesus had to do, he found the time for prayer. Indeed, it was his prayer that empowered him to make the best use of his time in continuing his ministry--"Let us go to the nearby villages that I may preach there also." May we find the time and place for prayer in our busy lives, lest they become without happiness and hope.

© 2005, OCP. All rights reserved.

Responsorial Psalm Psalm 147:1-2, 3-4, 5-6

✠ (cf. 3a) Praise the Lord, who heals the brokenhearted.

Or:

✠ Alleluia.

Praise the LORD, for he is good;
sing praise to our God, for he is gracious;
it is fitting to praise him.
The LORD rebuilds Jerusalem;
the dispersed of Israel he gathers.

He heals the brokenhearted
and binds up their wounds.
He tells the number of the stars;
he calls each by name.

Great is our LORD and mighty in power;
to his wisdom there is no limit.
The LORD sustains the lowly;
the wicked he casts to the ground.

Commentary Psalm 147:1-2, 3-4, 5-6 by Tom Conry: No songs are composed or sung in a social vacuum; no music is innocent of its surroundings. This is especially true of sacred music. Every sung moment (and thus, every psalm) is highly charged with a point of view, and every chorus inevitably produces its winners and losers.

Today's psalm belongs to the "Hallelujah Psalms" (146-150, but also 113-118), and in its Hebrew text it begins and ends with the untranslatable exclamation Hallelujah! The reference to building up Jerusalem is probably a reference to the building up of Jerusalem's walls by Nehemiah (Neh 12:27f), although the Greek version of the psalm (i.e. in the Septuagint) connects the image to Haggai, Zechariah, and the rebuilding of the temple.

Psalm 147 is a song that reflects the royal liturgy of the postexilic community, and so one needs to be very careful indeed in performing its affirmations of the present situation. Brueggemann calls this psalm "the massive rhetoric of present well-being . . . one is not likely to notice a

present needfulness that contradicts one's own present abundance" (Brueggemann 1988:102). True enough, there are occasional gestures in the text towards God's transformational justice, but these are overlaid and all but drowned out with the royal language of prosperity. It is easy enough to begin by praising God's plan for the universe and, before we know it, to wind up praising the ruler who presents himself as the interpreter and guarantor of God's power and wisdom. Hidden behind this language lies the psalm's theological core: that God's creative power is salvific, and that the fundamental nature of creation is inextricably bound up in compassion and justice.

© 2003, OCP. All rights reserved.

Second Reading 1 Corinthians 9:16-19, 22-23

A reading from the first Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians

Brothers and sisters:

If I preach the gospel, this is no reason for me to boast,
for an obligation has been imposed on me,
and woe to me if I do not preach it!
If I do so willingly, I have a recompense,
but if unwillingly, then I have been entrusted with a stewardship.
What then is my recompense?
That, when I preach,
I offer the gospel free of charge
so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.

Although I am free in regard to all,
I have made myself a slave to all
so as to win over as many as possible.
To the weak I became weak, to win over the weak.
I have become all things to all, to save at least some.
All this I do for the sake of the gospel,
so that I too may have a share in it.

The word of the Lord.

Commentary 1 Corinthians 9:16-19, 22-23 by Virginia Smith: If congregants really hear what Paul is saying today (and they will if the lector proclaims the message properly), it should leave them shifting uneasily in their seats. Paul clearly understands that he has a duty and responsibility to preach the Gospel. He can either do it willingly or unwillingly, but he is compelled to do it. This ought to leave all of us wondering when we last preached the Gospel, if ever, and how we felt about it if we did.

Some Catholics see evangelization as strictly the province of the clergy and professed religious, but Paul was neither of these. When others think of preaching, it conjures up images of people shouting into bullhorns on busy street corners. But in fact it should come as naturally as breathing. What generally dominates our conversation? Those things which are most important

to us. If there's a big event coming up in our life, those around us are sure to hear about it. Hopefully, we do that in a manner that is both effective and inoffensive. The same is true of our faith. It should just naturally find its way into our exchanges with others.

We've all heard that the best way to preach is by example, and that is also true. Francis of Assisi urged his followers to preach always and, if necessary, to use words. Like Paul, we are all called as disciples to preach Jesus by both word and action. How seriously do we take that commission?

© 2008, OCP. All rights reserved.

Gospel Acclamation

Matthew 8:17

✠ Alleluia, alleluia.

Christ took away our infirmities
and bore our diseases.

Gospel Mark 1:29-39 A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark

On leaving the synagogue

Jesus entered the house of Simon and Andrew with James and John.
Simon's mother-in-law lay sick with a fever.
They immediately told him about her.
He approached, grasped her hand, and helped her up.
Then the fever left her and she waited on them.

When it was evening, after sunset,
they brought to him all who were ill or possessed by demons.
The whole town was gathered at the door.
He cured many who were sick with various diseases,
and he drove out many demons,
not permitting them to speak because they knew him.

Rising very early before dawn, he left
and went off to a deserted place, where he prayed.
Simon and those who were with him pursued him
and on finding him said, "Everyone is looking for you."
He told them, "Let us go on to the nearby villages
that I may preach there also.
For this purpose have I come."
So he went into their synagogues,
preaching and driving out demons throughout the whole of Galilee.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Lectionary for Mass in the Dioceses of the United States of America, volume I Copyright © 1970, 1997, 1998 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, D.C. All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

Commentary Mark 1:29-39 by Tom Conry: Because she is pictured as being in Simon's house alone (i.e. without a husband), Peter's mother-in-law is probably understood to be a widow by Mark's audience. The wonder or sign is not so much in her being "cured" as it is in her restoration to her place in the family, an important theme in this gospel.

It's hard to miss the liturgical language in the story of Simon's mother-in-law. Mark tells us she is reclining in her house (the same verb that is used for reclining at table in the eucharist/meal stories), and, after Jesus raises her (the same verb is used of Jesus' resurrection), she ministers to the group (the same verb is used repeatedly to signal service within the group of disciples, both at table and as the characteristic attitude of Jesus' followers). This is typical Marcan prefiguring: this nameless woman (shades of 14:9!), whose healing and service is immediately overshadowed by a huge crowd in the very next verse, is the model of discipleship. Her actions demonstrate that she already knows, out of her own experience, that healing implies an obligation of service. This is a lesson that will come much more slowly and painfully to the Twelve in Mark's gospel.

The description of the whole "city" being gathered outside Simon's door indicates that this is a small village, an out of the way place, one of those settings that don't matter very much to the outside world but matter a great deal in the context of the story. Jesus is literally going to the least of people in the least of places.

© 2003, OCP. All rights reserved.