

## 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time, 2021 Homily

**Job 7:1-7; Psalm 147:1-6; I Corinthians 9:16-19, 22-23; Mark 1:29-39**

While life has slowed down for some people during this global pandemic, life is still full. We find our days filling up with zoom meeting after zoom meeting. Working from home has been a blessing for many families, but it has also revealed more items on our To Do lists that have yet to be checked off.

Over 56 years ago, April 2, 1965, TIME magazine's cover was titled, "Computers in Society". One article predicted that with all the advancements in computers it wouldn't take long before we would be working 20 hours a week, computers would be doing the rest. We would have more leisure time than we would know what to do with.

There have certainly been amazing technological advancements in computers, personal computers as well as automation and robotics. Yet, most people still grind out at least 40 hours a week. Some estimates suggest the average work week is closer to 47 hours.

A recent article suggested the pandemic may signal the "perfect time to adopt" and establish a 20 hour work week. I am not holding my breath.

Jesus knew all about long days and many hours. He lived his life to serve others and we see in the beginning of Jesus' ministry a very busy day. Today's gospel reading followed last weeks and gives us (early in his public ministry) one of Jesus' 24 hour days. In the morning Jesus taught in the Temple and cast out a demon. After that, our passage for today, Jesus went to Simon Peter's home where he attended to Simon's mother-in-law who was sick with a fever. After healing her, we are told that "The whole town was gathered at the door. He cured many who were sick with various diseases, and he drove out many demons." Can you imagine. Word spread quick of Jesus' authority over demons and his healing powers. So many needs in the town, Jesus must have been physically, emotionally, and even spiritually exhausted. Although he was God, he was still totally human.

After such a long and full day, one might think Jesus needed rest, and I am sure he did, but Mark tells us what Jesus most needed was time with God. We are told, early in the morning before dawn, Jesus went to a "deserted place to pray." Whether we work 20 hours, 40 hours or 80 hours a week, Jesus demonstrates the vital necessity to spend time with God in prayer. If possible, away from all the pressures and needs of the day.

How often, when our days are busy, prayer is not the first thing we do, but the first thing that goes. We put off spending time with God due to the "tyranny of the urgent." Our lists are just too long to stop and pray. Yet, Jesus reveals the opposite, the busier the day, the more time one needs with God.

Lent is just around the corner. Ash Wednesday is a week from this Wednesday, February 17<sup>th</sup>. Fr. Michael Schmitz in his book, "How to Make Great Decisions" suggests we spend 20 minutes with God every day. He writes, "This time with Jesus is not because you need something...It's being in his presence and letting him love you; it's getting close to the Father's heart. Twenty minutes is possible, isn't it? That's not even a Netflix episode."

I want to echo Fr. Schmitz's suggestion to spend 20 minutes with God every day. If this seems too much, start by spending 20 during Lent - or commit 10 minutes a day in Lent. The point is to spend time with Jesus, receiving God's love.

Memorized prayers can be helpful, but I want to encourage you to sit with God in silence. In this 20 minutes, let God hug you. Let God love you, hold you, and encourage your spirit. The uncertainties surrounding COVID-19, even with the vaccinations, have raised the level of anxiety in most of our lives. Anxiety, depression, insomnia, anger, and hopelessness are all on the rise. Too many people are like Job in our first reading, "without hope."

No amount of work, however productive our hours may be, will give us the relief, the hope, the comfort, the love, and the peace we so desperately need. Spending time with God in silent prayer, letting God speak to us, letting God hold us, is the remedy Jesus reveals to His disciples who went searching for him. It is Jesus' remedy for us as well. Jesus knows us better than we know ourselves. He knows the fullness of our lives. Jesus knows he alone can give us the peace and love we long for. Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid" (John 14:27).

Have you hugged someone recently? Most of us have not, at least not someone outside our immediate family. Instead we are continually encouraged to stay 6 feet apart so as to do what we can to stop the spread of COVID-19.

To spend time with God is to let God hug us. To let the one who loves us infinitely more than we can possibly imagine be the one we rest our weary heads on.

I went into the SEARCH dental clinic for my daughter Savanna's appointment. The first thing they did was check our temperatures to make sure we didn't have a fever. It was the first time my fever had been checked since the pandemic. Thank God for technology, a quick wave over my forehead and my temperature was known. (I write with a laugh as I think, where was this when I was a child laying on my bed while my mother lubricated the glass thermometer.)

Regardless of how a temperature is taken, a fever is a tell-tale sign that something is not right with our bodies. Our immune system is fighting something.

In our Gospel, Peter's mother-in-law has a fever. Without antibiotics and other modern medicines, a fever in the first century could signal a very serious condition. It was serious enough that Jesus disciples "immediately told him about her." Mark goes on to say, "He (Jesus)

approached, grasped her hand, and helped her up. Then the fever left her and she waited on them.”

Jesus had cast out a demon, but this was his first healing. Taking her by the hand, Jesus used physical touch as part of the healing. In many of Jesus’ healings he used touch. He cast out demons with his voice, but he physically healed people with his touch (Mark 1:41; 5:41; 6:5; 7:32-33; 8:23-25).

I believe this says something about the power of human touch and closeness. The fact that so many people have not experienced human touch during the pandemic is one reason so many people are suffering.

It is well documented that children who are deprived of human touch as infants have a much greater chance of developmental challenges as they grow.

God knows our need for human connection and touch. That is one reason God sent Jesus in the flesh. It is one reason Jesus gives himself to us in the Eucharist.

St. Jerome while preaching on this same text in Mark around 400A.D. said: “O that Jesus would come to our house and enter and heal the fever of our sins by his command. For each and every one of us suffers from fever. When I grow angry, I am feverish. So many vices, so many fevers. But let us ask the apostles to call upon Jesus to come to us and touch our hand; for if he touches our hand, at once the fever flees” (*Corpus Christianorum* LXXVIII, 468).

In reality we are all “feverish” with the fever of sin. We all fall short of the glory of God. The Good News is that the antidote to the fever is Jesus. The Bible says, “For our sake He who knew no sin, became sin that we might become the righteousness of God.” We could say, He who knew no fever, became fever itself to bring healing and life to us and to the whole world. Jesus knows our fevers.

As I mentioned before, our first reading from Job reminds us how hard life can be. Job is nearly at the end of his rope and exhausted by the sorrows and difficulties of his life. Job felt his life was without hope and that he would never see happiness again. Yet we know the end of the story. Job did see brighter days. While job never fully understood the reason for his suffering, he did come to trust God. God had the final word, not Job’s lament.

Just as Jesus took the hand of Simon’s Mother-in-law and raised her up, Jesus wants to take each of us by the hand and lift us up. He alone has the knowledge, the love, the power, and the authority to raise us up that we might truly know his healing power and limitless mercy and grace.

One commentator points out that the Greek word for “helped her up” can be translated “raised her up.” It is the same word used of God raising Jesus from the dead. It is no small thing when Jesus takes us by the hand and lifts us up. It is no small thing when God holds us in His loving embrace.

God desires to hold you as you pray. Jesus' mission is to reveal God's love and lift you up. He alone knows all your struggles, anxieties, and the fevers of your life. Things haven't changed much in 1,600 years. The words of St. Jerome ring true today, "So many vices, so many fevers." Praise be to God who comes to us in Jesus and through the power of the Holy Spirit takes us by the hand and lifts us up to heal our anxious and "feverish" lives.

Have you been hugged by God recently? You have! But you may have not noticed. I encourage you again to spend time with Jesus. Let him love you and hold you and lift you up. He is our peace. He is our hope. He is our life, our friend, our guide and savior.

Hold our hands Jesus and lift us up.

I will pray for you and ask that you pray for me.

God bless you in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Deacon Steve