

As many of you know, our Sunday readings follow a three-year cycle. The Gospel readings for cycle A, B and C – as they are called, are dominated by passages from Matthew in year A, Mark in year B and Luke in year C --- so we are in year B – reading the Gospel of Mark.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Gospel – that of John – gets sprinkled in along the way in all 3 years – mostly in the Easter season --- and a stretch of summer's Ordinary Time in this year of Mark – because Mark is a very short Gospel – only 16 Chapters --- and so we need some more material to last us through the year.

The second reading each Sunday is chosen somewhat randomly – in order to ensure that a good part of the New Testament gets covered over the course of three years. Once we settle into reading from a particular letter of Paul – we tend to do it for several weeks at a time – as we have done with Paul's second letter to the Corinthians – we've been reading it since the onset of Ordinary Time – and will continue next week until we hit Lent --- yes, Lent is only a week and a few days away. . .

Now as for the first reading every week – it is selected to go with the Gospel reading. That is, these two readings are often linked in a particular way – chosen in order to shed light on some aspect of faith or discipleship – or to help us understand some attribute of God.

The first reading and the Gospel are meant to “work together” – helping us have an experience of God through these particular scriptures. . . And yet today, it may be difficult to see the connection between the two – for they seem to have little in common!

In the reading from the Book of Job, we hear Job despairing after enduring many hardships. With the exception of Jesus' passion and death, this reading is probably one of the more depressing ones we have on a Sunday: “Is not a person's life on earth a drudgery? We are slaves longing for the shade. Misery! Troubled nights! Restlessness – days come to an end without hope. Will we ever see happiness again?”

Wow – not much to be said after that – it kind of speaks for itself: Job, mister gloom and doom!

But in the Gospel --- we hear something totally different. We hear of Jesus curing Simon-Peter's mother-in-law, and then curing and driving out demons from all sorts of people who are brought to him. So what are we to make of these two readings? What's the connection? How do they work together on this 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time??

Well, it seems to me that these two readings place before us a choice – a choice which lies at the heart of being a person of faith. As we know, our actions have consequences. Our choices shape our world and shape the lives of others in one way or another. They are rarely neutral – rarely have little or no impact --- and that leads us to a very important question of discipleship: **Am I the kind of person who adds to the burdens of others – or do I help ease them?**

The Book of Job is a very rich story – for it speaks about some very deep truths which are universal to humans in every time and place: suffering, friendship, faith, and despair. . . We, of course, hear but a very small part of the complete story in today's reading. At the core

of the story of Job is a realization that Job finally comes to. Near the end of the story – and it is 42 chapters long, so some persistence is needed --- but near the end, Job eventually realizes that he will never understand God's ways --- and that's just how life works. . .

God is God, and we are not (as I think you have heard me say before!). And when Job begins to accept this fact – when he comes to this realization – **his life changes!**

He begins to see everything that he is blessed to have AS A GIFT – and yet the real gift he received was a heart no longer fixated on the “why” of life – but rather a Job humbled enough to admit that he doesn't have all the answers, and won't be able to figure it all out – **and that's okay: because he IS NOT God.** . . So, what gives? Are we supposed to just be “resigned” to our struggles, simply accept our disappointments, be resigned to injustices and our grief??

Now that's where the Gospel comes in! For there we see quite clearly – Jesus – who is our model for ministry – NOT ignoring the suffering in front him, but doing something about it – doing what he can to ease the pain and brokenness and the sorrow of others – Jesus – reaching out in love to people in need. . .

So back to that choice which lies at the heart of being a person of faith: are we going to add to the burdens of others --- or help ease them?

Will we build up other people by our words and actions – or tear them down?

Will we heal rather than harm?

Will we love rather than hate? >>

Will we contribute to making the world a little kinder, a little more compassionate, a little more bearable?

Job shows us that we will never understand how or why our lives unfold the way they do – never really comprehend our difficulties, struggles, joys or sorrows. Yet, just because God is in charge and we are not – doesn't give us a pass to do nothing. In fact, the opposite is true. . .

Where we see pain, where we see suffering, where we see poverty, where we see injustice, where we see disrespect and disregard --- **we have a choice?**

WHAT'S IT GOING TO BE???