

Proclamation of the Gospel

The Lord be with you.
And with your Spirit.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to St. Mark.
Glory to You, O Lord.

Upon leaving the synagogue Jesus entered the house of Simon and Andrew with James and John. And Simon's mother-in-law lay ill with a fever. The first thing they did was to tell Him about her. He went over to her, grasped her hand, and helped her up. The fever left her and immediately she began to wait on them. After sunset, as evening drew on, they brought Him all who were ill and those possessed by demons. Before long, the whole town was gathered outside the door. Those whom He cured were variously afflicted and there were many, and so were the demons He expelled. But, He would not permit the demons to speak because they knew Him. Rising early the next morning, He went off to a lonely place in the desert where He was absorbed in prayer. Simon and his companions managed to track Him down. When they found Him they told Him, "Everybody's looking for you." He said to them, "Let us move on to the neighboring towns and villages so that I may proclaim the Good News there also. For that is what I have come to do." So He went into their synagogues preaching the Good News and expelling demons throughout the whole of Galilee.

The Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ.

Homily by Fr. Gerry Hurley

Wow, another great gospel that really helps us in our preparation for the Lenten season. Yes? Yes! Good. What did you like about it, the Gospel? Healing!

This a second instance of healing. We're still in the first chapter of Saint Mark. He was in the synagogue last week, healing. The opening, upon leaving the synagogue now He enters the home of Simon. He is healing again. Next week, same Gospel. We're still in the first chapter of Mark. Another healing. He heals the leper next week. So we get the picture. In Mark's gospel it's very clear. It's a Mark theme, as well. That the demons recognize Him. Other people who should be recognizing Him fail to do so.

We'll come across that quite often as we journey with Mark in understanding the Christ. But, one thing we're getting very clear from the outset, in Saint Mark's Gospel there is no infancy narrative, no introduction about the shepherds coming and the star, the stable in Bethlehem and all that. Mark just moves right by that. He starts off his Gospel with Jesus' public ministry. Because that's what's critical. And what is it about? It's about healing. It's about healing people. It's about making people whole.

And so it rolls right in with our adage, yes? Our adage that we've been using, you know — "The Church often described as a hospital contains too many patients who fail to get well." Couldn't be a more profound truth. Could not be a more profound truth. "The Church often described as a hospital contains too many patients who fail to get well." Why? "The Church often described as a school contains too many pupils who fail to learn." Why?

Great factor. Looking through the Gospel, what instance do you see? What gets your attention?

Well, He comes. He moves into the house. They say, "Hey, by the way, Simon's mother-in-law is ill." He goes ahead. He takes her by the hand, lifts her up, and the fever leaves. The Healing Christ is present. Then she gets up and waits on them. Wow.

Yeah, some people caught that particular piece, you know? They say yeah she took care of her responsibility. No, that's peripheral. But it's interesting how the author, Saint Mark, noted that in there. She got up and she did what great people do — their ministry of service in Church. Brilliant.

And then, as evening drew on all of these people gathered outside of the door. Why did they gathered outside of the door? They're having Church. People have come to realize, hey something really significant is happening. The Messiah is here. I want healing — healing in my life. And so they line up outside the door, and He begins to heal them. And, He drives out the demons, but he makes them mute. Why? Because they know Him. And the contrast for Saint Mark is — the people who should know him, they don't speak up. They don't proclaim Him. But the ones who are somewhat estranged, they know Him. And they say, "Jesus, what are you doing with us? What do you want to do?" I want to heal. I want to bring the healing ministry.

The Church often described as a hospital contains too many patients who fail to get well.

And then here's a brilliant piece in the Gospel — Rising early the next morning, He went off to a lonely place to pray, to be in communion with the Father. And Simon Peter and his companions managed to find Him and they say, "Hey, everybody is looking for you." Isn't that cool? No? It is. Unless they are looking for you to, you know, kind of pay you back, or get something from you, or have you pay up. Yet it's great, and the disciples are enamored with this. And, they're saying, "Hey, everybody is looking for you. Man, let's go back and let's get this show on the road." And Jesus burst that bubble real quickly. He says, folks we've got one to the other towns and villages as well as proclaim the News. Because it's not about a good feeling. Gospel is not about a good feeling, a warm feeling, people are happy with us. The Gospel is the challenge to life. Wow! What a great teaching.

And then we have the First Reading which is such a beautiful contrast — that Job. If you want to read something in the Bible? Read the whole book of Job, one of the greatest literary pieces, probably coming out of the Egyptian tradition. Story very much like it in Egyptian Literature, and it's a real balancing thing. And here is poor Job. He finds out about the miseries and the hardship in his life, and his family die, and the crops, and the cattle — they're all gone, and all that he had, being a person of multiple possessions and gifts and things. And now he is speaking again. And he says — Job spoke saying, "Is not man's life on earth 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 my allotted portion."

Amazing how many people believe that. And the irony of it is, for nonbelievers it does appear to be their habitat, their personal experience. Only yesterday, somebody told me, "What's the point in talking to God anyway, if you don't hear back?" It's a good question. But it goes a whole lot deeper. Try speaking to people where it really did work and you'll see something. Where it really did work. But I can say, well I call out to Him. A lot of people do. I call out to Him, I don't hear anything back from Him. What am I supposed to do? Check with people where it really has come to light. They have found a mission and a ministry. That's a difference maker.

We were looking at the parable last week, you remember? Sure...about Norma. Thank you for your responses. I got a great number of responses. Thank you, Teresa for putting it on the front of the bulletin, for Christopher

who put his little story in there and remained anonymous. But, now he's happy that he wrote that and tells me it's okay I can say his name — on the front of the bulletin. What great connections with the story. So, we remember Norma. I even got a call from one person, "What was the company that she went to work for?" Yeah, there are always people work on the minutia, on the peripheral. You know, I said, "Hey the company was Murphy, Blarney and Bull, BS, Full Financial Services." And, then I found, hey are LLC, as well. What does that mean? Limited Liability Corporation — Wow! How in the world did we ever get to that? How in the world could you choose to be a limited liability corporation? Let's be honest. Are we not responsible anymore? Is that what it means? Do we not take responsibility for ourselves and for what we produce, and what we do? Or do we just put LLC behind? Wow, that's fascinating to me. But, they are an LLC Corporation. And Norma has now taken up her position. And we ended, she was at lunch last week. And I got a lot of emails from you, and a lot of great information from you. She sat down to lunch with two cohorts, and then two other people join her. Roy is one of those, and another lady. And they sit at the table, and Norma still has a lot of questions. She has asked about Bridget who doesn't come to lunch. I even heard from people who weren't here at mass, but they heard the homily on the website. Nice to hear from you, thank you. It's something we should be dialoguing about.

And so Norma continues now to press and say, she says, "Does anybody really know Bridget? I know I've heard what you said, but it's a whole lot of things. Has anybody ever talked to her? Has anybody ever sat down and really tried to find out what is happening in her life?" And Roy insists, take my advice. Don't have anything to do with her. It's an easy way of dealing with things.

So I want to tell you another parable today. Great story. It's Paula. She went on her retreat. She had been listening, and the Lord said, "This is the retreat. Five day retreat on contemplative prayer." And so she went off to the retreat.

This is her own words about her retreat experience. She said:

And I arrived there. I realized I was walking in there knowing the perfect way to do this silent, directed retreat. And I was the first to arrive, and so I waited in the parlor of this retreat home as everyone else arrived. The first person that arrived was a young man carrying a guitar. And I looked at him and inside I thought, "Tsk. Tsk. No one comes to a silent retreat with the music making instrument. The priest will tell him."

The second person arrived, and it was a man carrying two guitars and the largest portable case for CDs that I had ever seen in my life. And again I sat there and I thought "They don't know how to do it. I know how. When you're at a silent retreat, you're silent. But surely they will be told."

And then I watched a young woman come in, a wonderful young woman, and she was dressed in a long, flowing dress, and she kind of announced that she was a dancer. And I looked at her in all of my judgment and I thought, "Well, no one wears flowing dresses to a retreat. She's gonna learn that in a couple of days. People wear the same thing. They wear sweatpants. They look terrible. They wear blue jeans. But I hope these people can get with the program."

But in fact, when we met in a circle that night, and when we asked one another for prayer, no one gave any direction to any of these people about what to wear or to put away the music. So, I went up to my little room — I remember it well — it was room number five — only to find that one of the guitar players was in the room next to me, and he played his guitar late into the night. I thought to myself, "I came here for community, obviously. Because I live alone. I could have stayed at home and it would've been plenty quiet. I came here for community, but it's the wrong community. And it is a noisy community, and I think I've paid good money to have a really horrid experience."

I awakened the next morning trying to look positive. And I thought to myself, well he's still playing music next door. But I knew a good place out in the yard for I had been there before. And I decided I would find

that place and I would have quiet. There had been quite a chill in the air because this was Indiana. A cold front had swept through and I had believed that they were in the blistering heat wave. And I, who am always cold, had arrived just in shorts and a T-shirt. So, I put a blanket around me and went out to the yard only to discover the guitar player number two had taken up residence in the yard. And he was singing to his heart's content, and I spent the whole first day of my retreat angry inside thinking they don't know how to do this. This is a false community. I can't believe I have landed here.

I would love to have the comments of the priest who was directing me throughout my retreat, and you probably would as well. But he got sort of an earful that first day when I had my hour with him, and he told me to go back and try harder. (Wow. That's a Catholic one, isn't it? Try harder.) So the next day, with music still next door and music still outside, I went into the far reaches of the property. This time I took two blankets. I found a hammock. I just sank into the hammock. It was wonderful. This will be it, I thought to myself. This is the quiet that I need for my journey. All a sudden, I see a flash of color and there was the dancer in just an exquisite flowing dress, and she was just pirouetting around the lawn. I took my Bible and I harummped back to my room and that was day number two. And it was just lost to me.

On the third day, I tried to sit in a place in the yard that was not visually near the dancer, that was not audibly in the force field of the singer, and then I began to notice that there was a woman who was attending our retreat. An older woman, and she was just pacing around the house — constantly pacing around the perimeter of this house, and I thought to myself, "What is she doing? If she wants to take a walk, then let her go someplace and walk. Again, it's just ruined my perfect contemplation.

For the three days at the beginning of that retreat, — which caused my daughter once to say it's a good thing it was a five-day retreat, I found myself looking with a set of eyes that were only looking out of my own need — out of my own place. How is this affecting me? It is not affecting me well. I do not like this. This is uncomfortable for me. And so I went that afternoon and I took a really long walk.

So, my question is: What does Paula need to discover on her walk?
Is this retreat redemptive? Three days have been spent already.
Is it possible to redeem it and really bring about something graceful and grateful?
How can she bring forth some really goodness from this experience?
Can God break through that austere disposition? How?
What is it going to take to change her attitude, her perspective?

And, finally, you're her advisor — What advice would you give her besides "go home?" I want you to reflect on it during the course of the week, and I'll tell you next week what happened with Paula and her retreat.