

Homily  
February 4, 2024  
5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time  
23:33 – 33:28

Have you ever been in a conversation with someone, and they reveal something about themselves? Maybe it's a longing. Maybe it's an event in their life about which you knew nothing. And your response is, "I didn't know that about you."

Well, you see, we don't know everything about each other. There are many facets to each one of us. Some of the parts of us we just don't talk about. Either because we want to hide them (once in a while) or it just doesn't seem the right time to mention it. We are multifaceted and it's an adventure to get to know the fullness of the other. And for most of us, it's partly an adventure and a terrifying experience to reveal more of us to another. Hold onto that.

The Book of Job is one of the Books of Wisdom. It's forty-two chapters long and it is a "wisdom story." It's not historical. It was never meant to be. The wonder of the Book of Job is its magnificent poetry. Which because we don't read Hebrew, we can't pick that up. But the scholars say it's just absolutely beautiful. And within the book there is a dialogue both among humans - and humans, in the person of Job, with the Divine. The book wrestles with many issues, especially human misery and loss, and the false relationship of suffering and sinfulness.

Ultimately, towards the end, God reveals in a whirlwind the inscrutable reality, the awe-filled reality of his thoughts and ways, far beyond the human capacity for understanding. He basically says that some answers to human reality, only I know. And it's not that he's holding it back. Humans can't understand the awesomeness of God and the power of God.

In fact, God says to Job, in the opening line of his monologue, "Job, where were you when I created the heavens and the earth?"

The Gospel of Mark is a remarkable piece of writing, especially its pace. It just moves so quickly, one thing after the other. There's this phrase and then, and then, and then. And this begins, even in the very first chapter.

There's the opening sentence. There's the preaching of the Baptist. There's the baptism in the Jordan. There's the briefest – only three verses – relating of the temptation of Jesus in the desert. There's the calling of the disciples. And the cure of the demoniac - last week's Gospel account.

All of this in twenty-eight verses. It's exhausting. But throughout the first chapter, and indeed all the way to the end of Chapter 16, God's accessibility in Christ – Emmanuel – is revealed. God is well aware, as it unfolds, of human suffering and misery in and through the person of Christ. Christ pays attention to the needs he encounters – physical, spiritual and psychological. He reaches out. He attends. In that, we believe, God's hand rests upon humanity.

The two sides of God. Well, there's more than just two – the two we have in these readings. God is omnipotent. That is, all powerful. God is omniscient. That is all-knowing. And God is all-seeing. I don't know what the "omni" word is for that.

But even as Job voices an outcry of the human heart in the lament we heard in the first reading, even as Job parries the attempts of his three friends, who insist that what is happening to him is because of his own sin and his own folly, and even as he has to do the same with the youthful Elihu, who repeats what the others have already said, God remains inscrutable, waiting for the noise to calm and a time for Job to listen intently and learn.

God is beyond. God is transcendent. God is many things that we could not possibly understand. And yet, God in his self-revelation through Christ is imminent, is ever-present. In just the first chapter of Mark's account, Jesus Christ reveals that God is aware of our misery, our pain and our suffering. God-through-Jesus is attentive, compassionate, open to what is before him, to bring comfort – even healing.

Brothers and sisters we, like Job and the many sufferers about whom we hear in the Gospels, all struggle with seemingly unanswered prayers, human suffering, innocent victimization. We face things in life that are inexplicable and very frustrating.

Do you ever get frustrated when your prayers aren't answered immediately? Does it confound you when you see someone good suffering? Are there questions that you can't wait to stand before God in heaven and say,

“All right. I’ve got a whole list here. You’re God and I know you can answer them...” Anybody else have those?

(raising his hand) I do.

I want to know why he invented the duckbill platypus. And some more important things, too. But beyond that which is inexplicable, beyond us - in time we remember, as Job did and the many folks in the Gospels – that God is attentive.

We may not recognize this immediately. But in time, the wisdom of living moves into our hearts. And without answering all of our questions or relieving all of our pain, the need to know diminishes and our acceptance of the reality we have increases.

This is all rooted in the gift of the Paschal Mystery. God who has revealed through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, is ultimate attention and hope for us. And it is the responsibility of the Church to continue this – revealing the God who is beyond and the God who is in our midst.

We’re going to do a small thing at the end of Mass today. It’s the tradition of the “blessing of throats,” through the intercession of St Blaise, bishop and martyr. It’s one of those moments when the attentive healing hand, through the Church, touches us – literally. It is a moment of hope for us that we will not be totally overwhelmed by disease. It’s a simple thing. It’s a devotional practice. But it has a powerful meaning and a reassurance of hope beyond what we cannot understand.