

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year B

Job 7: 1-4, 6-7
Ps 147:1-2, 3-4, 5-6
I Cor 9:16-19, 22-23
Mk 1:29-39

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One of my weekly rituals (apart from liturgy) is staying up
to watch at least the first half of Saturday Night Live.
I must admit, it's getting harder and harder to stay awake!
One of my favorite skits in recent years is "Debbie Downer,"
which, I think, all SNL fans remember very well.
Rachel Dratch plays the character Debbie,
who, along with other cast members, are in Disney World.
No matter how wonderful a time everyone is having,
Debbie finds something to say – a story, a remark –
that brings the level of excitement down and depresses everyone,
with the sound of a horn in the background reflecting the
downward direction of the conversation.
It's hysterical. And what adds to the humor is that the cast members,
Rachel Dratch included, cannot keep a straight face throughout the entire skit,
and, by the scene's end, they cannot control their own laughter.

I wonder if we may see Debbie Downer in the person of Job.
Many of us resist Job, or try to overlook him,
maybe because he is the "Debbie Downer" of our tradition –
and we don't want to be brought down.
Instead, we're more attracted to Paul, who is often much more positive in his outlook.
For instance, he admits in the letter to the Corinthians
that while the gospel is an obligation that has been imposed on him,
he wants to preach it fully – to the best of his ability.
However, the last line of the reading from Job today really hits us hard.
"I shall not see happiness again."
Now that's a bit jolting, especially when we immediately hear after that
"The Word of the Lord." With our response, "Thanks be to God."
Huh? How can this be the end of the reading?
How can we say "Thanks be to God" to "I shall not see happiness again?"
What was that all about?
It really does seem to be a Debbie Downer moment in Scripture.

This reading can leave us really hanging with no sense of hope.

We want someone to say,
 “No, Job, that is not true. Life isn’t like that. That’s not it’s purpose.”
 Instead, it just seems to end.
We want there to be a response – a positive response.

Enter the person of Jesus.

These past few weeks of Ordinary Time,

 Jesus has called his first disciples and brought them around
 on his mission of preaching and healing.

 In today’s Gospel, we see Jesus in the midst of his healing ministry.

 We see Jesus with great confidence and strength embrace those who are sick.

 He encounters Simon’s mother-in-law who lay with fever,
 and who, after being grasped by Jesus, is well again
 and begins a ministry of service.

 We see Jesus encounter people going through rough moments in their lives,

 He grasps them by the hand and tells them,

 “Rise and get up. There is more to be done here.”

 These are all people weighed down by hardship,

 looking for a meaningful response to their lives,

 who tell Jesus how they’re feeling,

 how their day is going, what is bothering them.

 Maybe they are all a bunch of Debbie Downers,

 but they are not unlike Job from our first reading.

 Jesus answers them. Jesus responds to them.

 Jesus grasps them by the hand, helps them up, and says,

 “Come with me. I will show you life. I will show you more.”

Once again, my sisters and brothers, we have another step on the road to discipleship,
another step on how to follow Jesus.

 It’s in our reach, our grasp. It’s in *the* grasp, the grasp of Jesus,

 who, despite the heaviness that life sometimes is,

 takes us by the hand and helps us get up.

 Today’s gospel is a promise for those of us weighed down by hardship, by heaviness.

 It is a promise that Christ will grasp,

 Christ will help us to get up once more and follow.

The promise is a lived reality in this liturgy that we celebrate here and now.

 We are all gathered as one around this table,

 but we all have come here from different parts of our life’s journey.

 Some of us are like Job right now; others of us are more like Paul;

 maybe most of us are somewhere in between the two.

 However, by virtue of our baptism, in this liturgy,

 we are grasping and being grasped by the Christ in each of us,

 who calls us to this table, and who shares himself with us.

 Because of that, we have the responsibility as brothers and sisters in Christ

 to grasp each other by the hand and walk the journey of life together.

May we continue to grasp and be grasped by the presence of Christ among us,
who calls to us, "Rise and get up."