

Homily. 5th Sunday in Ordinary Time. Year. B. 3/4 February 2024.

Most of us are familiar with the story of Job. He represents all of us when we experience loss and grief, doing so for no seemingly good reason. Job had it all and then, though he was a good, faithful and just person, he lost everything and tried to work out why. Job didn't hold his hurts and troubles back from God. He long and loudly lamented his losses to the Lord. He also told his friends of what had befallen him. They came, sat with him and tried to help make sense of his calamity. Job listened to his friends, too, even though their best efforts could make neither rhyme nor reason of his sad fate. Only God could do that, and in the end God did speak directly to Job. God honoured Job's patience, long-suffering and prayer, restoring twice over all that he'd lost. Job is one of the great biblical figures whose story helps show us how to respond faithfully to the Word of God when we find ourselves in the pits of despair.

St. Paul was well educated in the Jewish scriptures, our Old Testament. He was fervent and zealous for his faith. He was also a perfectionist on the edge of a crisis. His direct encounter with the Risen Lord on the road to Damascus changed him utterly, as well as the course of the rest of his life. He realised that he had been saved by faith and by God's work for him in Jesus Christ, and not by any power or works of his own making.

Paul then redirected all of his considerable energies and talents to the service of Jesus and his Good News. He set himself to preach, teach and explain all that God had done and keeps on doing for us in Christ. He helped form and guide a number of early Church communities. His letters reveal how he taught them and applied God's word to the real situations

and challenges they faced. These writings reveal that Paul was a man of deep prayer and insight, a man of the Holy Spirit. He never claimed to be infallible, just in touch with what God wanted and was saying, putting all of his strength into making this known and into practicing what he preached. The Word of God had found a home in Paul. He desired the same for us, doing everything he could to make this possible for us.

In St. Mark's fast paced Gospel, ever busy Jesus preaches about the advent of God's Reign. He showed by healings from sickness and the restoration of people to balance and wholeness that God was both present and active. All of this work drew from one source; his quiet times spent in reflection and prayer. Everyone had plans for what Jesus ought do, even his disciples. But, as we've heard, Jesus was focus's only on God's plans for him.

We have plans, too, many of them. Sometimes they're in tune with God, at other times they aren't, being driven by our egos and passions. Heeding the Scriptures, pondering their meaning and message to us and chatting with God about our hurts, fears, hopes and dreams is our prayer. As it was with Jesus, this empowers us by putting our works closer to the tune that God is playing. Preparing for our Sunday Mass, giving this sacred time together our best effort and attention is one staple of our diet on the Word of God. Jesus then satisfies our hunger and quenches our thirst by giving himself to us in this place, the strength and communion of God's Word dwelling within us for our use and service over week ahead.