

## The Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time February 7, 2021

There is probably no other reading at Mass that is as honest and relatable as today's first reading from the Book of Job. "Is not man's life on earth a drudgery?"

We can all relate to Job's words. Whether we are poor or rich, whether we work outside or in an office, we know the meaning of drudgery. Much of our days are caught up doing things we'd rather not do. It starts in the morning when our alarm clock goes off and doesn't end until we lay our head on the pillow that night, only to do it all over again the next day. The monotony of our work can become mind numbing and we start to live for our days off. But then, even the weekends are filled with housework and errands. There are times when it seems we just can't get a break.

"Is not man's life on earth a drudgery?"

Jesus also knew the drudgery of life very well. He lived most of his years on earth as a simple laborer. He knew what it was like to hit His thumb with a hammer, to have people criticize His work, and to push through when His body just wanted to rest. He knew what it was like to get home tired and achy after a long day.

And the drudgery did not end when He began His ministry of preaching and healing. Traveling from town to town on foot meant many days of just walking on dusty roads and climbing rocky hills. When He entered a town the crowds pressed on Him from every side jostling Him around and leaving Him no room to rest. The gospels tell us that thousands of people would gather to hear Him speak and that He would teach them all day until the sun went down. Then, when that was done, people from all around would bring the sick to Him so that He could heal them. Saint Mark tells us in today's gospel that "the whole town was gathered at the door." To get any time to pray, He had to get up early in the morning before anyone else was awake. Even then, people pursued Him, as Simon does in today's gospel when he tells Jesus, "Everyone is looking for you."

Jesus experienced our humanity in every way including the drudgery of life.

Because Jesus knows how difficult and demanding our lives are, we can bring all this to Him in our prayer. Many times, we can feel guilty about complaining to God about the burdens we carry. We tell ourselves to be happy with what we have, that many people have it worse off than we do, and that we are lucky to have a job or to be able to get an education. All that is true, but Jesus still wants us to share our hearts with

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Him honestly. If we are angry, He wants to hear about it. If we want to complain about our boss, about our client, or about our teacher, He wants to know that we trust Him enough to give it all to Him. Sometimes, Jesus is the only person who can truly understand us or whom we are truly free to complain to.

In fact, many people's first experience of truly praying from the heart comes from just yelling out to God all their frustration and anger. When we do that, we are not just telling God what we think He wants to hear but what we truly feel in our hearts. We are sharing our authentic selves with God full of trust that He will continue to love us just as we are. Then we can experience what we hear in today's responsorial psalm - "Praise the Lord, who heals the brokenhearted." Expressing our anger and frustration to God will not make our problems go away but will remind us that we are not alone in our struggles. We have a God who walks alongside us and who helps us carry our burden.

Also, Jesus teaches us that the drudgery of our daily lives can be transformed through love. If we accept the difficulties of life with love they can become opportunities to do good. For instance, perhaps we could offer up the difficulties of our job for a loved one who is sick or for a friend who has lost his faith. Also, if we are making something, we can pray for the person who will eventually use it. Or, we can pray for the people who work with or for our clients, especially the annoying ones. In that way, we are making our whole day a prayer and elevating the most challenging times of that day so that they become channels of God's love.

When Our Lady appeared to the shepherd children in Fatima, she urged them to offer up all their suffering to God for the conversion of sinners. She taught them this simple prayer that all of us can repeat when we are suffering during the day - "O Jesus, it is for love of you, for the conversion of sinners, and for the sins committed against the Immaculate Heart of Mary." All of us should learn this prayer and use it throughout our day. It will put us into the habit of turning to God whenever we are struggling and help us to accept the drudgery of life with patience and serenity.

The drudgery of life should also remind us of our need to rest. Our bodies and minds can only do so much. We need to recharge by spending time with our family and friends. They are the reason we are working so hard in the first place. Yet it becomes so easy to overlook them when the demands of life press down upon us. That is why it is so important for us to observe Sunday as a day of rest with our families and loved ones. It all begins with going to Mass together as a family, sharing a meal together, and enjoying each other's company. We all should be doing whatever it takes to not fill our

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Sundays up with chores, shopping, and other activities that can wait for another day. Worshipping and celebrating with our families should be the number one priority on Sundays.

Life is full of drudgery. That is something we can all agree on. While our faith does not relieve the burdens of our earthly life, it can transform that suffering into channels of grace for us and for others. It begins by turning to Jesus throughout our day to offer Him the difficulties we face and allowing Him to carry it with us. At Mass, we also have the opportunity to include our sacrifices with the sacrifice of bread and wine offered at the altar. Just as it is transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ, the drudgery of our daily lives is transformed through the power of Jesus' resurrection and, in the process, we are transformed into more loving and holier people.