

5 Sunday B

February 7, 2021

St. Patrick

The well-known Jesuit author, Father James Martin, tells the true story that the mother of a friend of his was in the hospital at the same time that the bishop of that city was also a patient. (It wasn't Bishop David.) After his surgery the bishop made the rounds on his hospital floor, visiting other patients. When he visited the mother of Father Martin's friend, who was recovering from a major operation, the bishop said, piously, "Well dear, I know exactly how you feel."

And the woman replied, "Really? Did you have a hysterectomy too?" (1)

In the flesh Jesus, too, came to be one with us, and he lived our human life fully. In a real way he came to "know exactly how we feel." And so, still in the first chapter of St. Mark's Gospel, we hear that Jesus brought healing to the sick. I want us to hear *how* St. Mark's Gospel tells the story. It teaches us so much. Speaking of Simon Peter's mother-in-law, it says that Jesus **"took her by the hand and raised her up."** Yes, it says that Jesus **"*raised her up.*"** It's the very same Greek word that this Gospel later uses to tell us about Jesus' own resurrection on Easter Sunday.

You see, having faced suffering himself head-on at Calvary, Jesus was raised up. Likewise, Jesus **"raises us up"** in the midst of our trials.

In today's Gospel story, he took Simon's mother-in-law **"by the hand,"** something a male could never do in public with a woman except with a close family member. The sick woman was **"raised up"** by Jesus; and then, immediately, she ministered to others. She served them. (2)

Again and again, I see the same dynamic—Jesus taking us by the hand and raising us up, such that we then reach out in service of others.

In *The Commercial Appeal* this week there was a touching story about the parents of one of our St. Patrick's parishioners. Rene and Bill Platten are well-known in our diocese for service to the poor, by means of the Room-in-the-Inn, Manna House, and other ministries. Our parishioner's father, Bill, died in late November from Covid-19. It has been an excruciatingly painful loss for the family—much like the anguish of the families of more than 1300 persons who have thus far died from the coronavirus in Shelby County.

Ten days ago, after spending part of the morning at Manna House, a hospitality center for the homeless and others who are destitute, I was leaving to return to St. Patrick's. Parked in the front, someone was unloading clothes and shoes for those at Manna House. All of a sudden, I heard the person say, "Hi, Father Val." These days, with masks, I can't immediately recognize a lot of folks. It was Rene, the mother of our parishioner, and the wife of forty-four years of the man who had died two months ago from Covid-19. We talked only briefly, but I haven't gotten the encounter out of my heart.

Simon Peter's mother-in-law experienced Jesus taking her by the hand, and he **"raised her up."** Then, she served others. Likewise, Jesus has taken Rene by the hand and, I suggest, is bringing her out of her tomb of deep loss so that even now, she's ministering to others—like at the Manna House.

When Jesus was **"raised up"** on Easter Sunday, he still had the scars—those of the nail prints in his hand and in his side. Likewise, those who are going through great loss in this year of the pandemic—yes, they too have scars. Still, by grace, they experience Jesus **"raising them up"** to new life. And they can't help but to serve others. They've *got* to minister to others.

In our first reading, we hear of Job being mired in misery. We too go through those seasons of wretchedness—in Job's words, **"I am allotted months of emptiness, and nights of misery are apportioned to me...The night is long, and I am full of tossing until the dawn."**

St. Patrick's: In such moments, *have we allowed Jesus to take us by the hand and "raise us up"?* I've seen it happen, again and again—in the words of our Opening Prayer for this Sunday's Mass, **"relying solely on the hope of heavenly grace."** And when it does happen, immediately—like Simon Peter's mother-in-law—those touched by Jesus' grace serve others. They minister to others.

It's worth asking again: Have we allowed Jesus to take us by the hand and **"raise us up"?**

(1) James Martin, S.J., Between Heaven and Mirth (New York: Harper One, 2011) pg. 96.

(2) See Eugene LaVerdiere, The Beginning of the Gospel: Introducing the Gospel According to Mark, Vol. 1 (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1999), pp. 71-73.

General Intercessions

February 7, 2021

5th Sunday in Ordinary Time B

Lead us, baptized in the Holy Spirit, to be a church raised up by Jesus for service of others; we pray to you, O Lord—

Inspire leaders of our nation, as well as other nations, to dialogue and negotiate for the sake of peace, and bring military personnel safely home; we pray to you, O Lord—

During this Black History Month, lead all of us to defeat systemic racism in our nation and church; we pray to you, O Lord—

Ease the struggles of those who endure mental illness, and bless their caregivers with peace; we pray to you, O Lord—

Give healing to those with the coronavirus; bring protection to all who have received the vaccine; give safety to all frontline workers; empower us to show care in protecting others from the virus; and, deepen hope in all of us; we pray to you, O Lord—

**Welcome all who have died into your loving presence, especially as we pray for Edgar Agudelo and Eugenia Pera—as well as all who have died from Covid-19;
we pray to you, O Lord—**

