

Today’s reading from the book of Job is replayed daily as we confront images of the unimaginable suffering of our brothers and sisters in the human family due to a variety of circumstances, some natural, many others sadly, of human creation. Recently, a California family who escaped the devastating Thomas Fire in December a couple of weeks ago experienced their house swept away by the mudslides caused by torrential rains washing over the fire-ravaged hillsides near Montecito, California killing a couple of their children who just weeks before escaped the fires with them. You wonder why after experiencing so much destruction and loss through a fire they now must bear the crushing sorrow of the deaths of their children by a flood? How much more can such people endure? Theirs is the cry of Job: “Is not man’s life on earth a drudgery? ...I have been assigned months of misery, and troubled nights have been allotted to me. ...I shall not see happiness again.”

Jesus begins his ministry in St. Mark’s Gospel directly confronting evil and the suffering it brings. Last Sunday he healed the man possessed by an evil spirit. Today he heals Simon Peter’s mother-in-law. Next Sunday he will restore physical and spiritual health to a leper. As mentioned last week, a central theme of St. Mark’s Gospel account is the confrontation and the ultimate defeat by Jesus of evil, sin and death in its many manifestations.

Jesus’ works his miracles of healing not to solicit acclaim for himself but ultimately to awaken faith and trust in the word of God embodied by him to restore in humankind God’s vision of a world united as brothers and sisters under his providence. Jesus is Divine Mercy become flesh. Jesus is Mercy: love’s response to suffering. In St. Matthew’s Gospel Jesus spells this out very clearly: “Come to me all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and humble of heart and your souls will find rest for my yoke is easy and my burden light.” (Mt.11:28-30). For Jesus, and now for his church, no human being whatever their condition, wherever they may live or be found in our society or the world is excluded from God’s mercy, our merciful outreach, our practice of hospitality, care and safety.

While we may not be able to work the same kind or types of physical miracles Jesus worked, by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit given us through our baptism, confirmation and renewed in our participation in the Holy Eucharist we are called, equipped and sent to bring mercy, to the suffering whomever and wherever they may be, to “take their hand and raise them up.” Remembering the sick, praying for them, and visiting them opens or restores their connection to us. Each Sunday our parish homebound ministers of Holy Communion visit members not able to be physically with us as well as patients who self-identify or whose families place them on the Catholic census list at Mary Greely Hospital. Our Stephen Ministers accompany those among us, and some from outside our community referred to us, on various journeys of suffering and trial as a compassionate companion. Numbers of the outreach services of our parish Social Justice Committee are means of providing relief to the suffering and afflicted. Our Bereavement Ministry reaches out to those who walk through the valley of the “shadow of death” offering presence and comfort at the time of death and after.

At this time of year all of us are invited to join others in our archdiocese in financially supporting the work of Catholic Charities. A special message from Archbishop Jackels is included in this weekend’s Bulletin. Catholic Charities through its services is our hands and our hearts reaching out to embrace, lift up, and offer healing to our brothers and sisters whose brokenness and burdens are heavy. As a priest of this archdiocese, Catholic Charities is the first place I refer people to if our parish community does not have the resources to meet their specific need. I realize this is another financial appeal for an outreach ministry. But your generosity to the monthly Black Bag collection, food pantry appeal and the recent clothing drive for St. Vincent DePaul all demonstrate this parish’s taking the Gospel injunctive of mercy to heart. Please consider as generous a sacrificial gift as you can give. No gift is too large or too small. God uses them all. Thank you.

Once again we profess faith in and praise the Lord who is close to and heals the brokenhearted.

Fr. Jim Secora