

JESUS SMASHES THE CHAINS OF MISERY: 5TH SUNDAY B

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On his way to his office each morning, a married deacon drops in to the same café for a cup of coffee. He is always served by the same waitress. She is a bright and breezy person who always adds to her *'Good Morning'* greeting the words *'And how are you today?'* Now the deacon always asks the waitress in return: *'And how are you?'* One morning not so long ago she answered: *'OK, I suppose, but somehow I'm not living life to the full, even though I have the best husband in the world and a beautiful new baby.'*

That young woman was indicating mild disappointment and dissatisfaction with her life. There was something missing, but she could not name just what it was. But her mild restlessness was nothing to the dissatisfaction that poor old Job in our First Reading is feeling. The bottom has dropped out of his world, and his friends are no help at all. They keep teasing and taunting him. So he finds himself in a state of acute depression, and even thinks he'd be better off dead.

Probably we all know people who are longing and craving for fulfilment in their lives, but who remain bundles of misery. Their conversations are all about *'poor me'*, all gloom and doom. Perhaps, at least sometimes, we ourselves feel so down and depressed that we come close to despair, and even feel we have nothing left to live for.

It's clear from the gospel that Jesus felt deeply for people whose lives were out of whack with their hopes, dreams and expectations, and that he reached out to them whenever, wherever, and however he could. To break their chains of misery and give them meaning, hope and support is what he was on about. Did he not say: *'I have come that they may have life and have it to the full'* (Jn 10:10)?

Jesus himself must have been feeling tired and even exhausted after taking part in the evening service at the synagogue in Capernaum that day, then curing Peter's mother-in-law from a fever, and going on to heal the many sick and troubled persons crowding round the front door of Peter's house. Yet the very next morning he gets up before sunrise and leaves the house for an isolated spot where he can be alone with God in order to renew his strength and commitment in prayer. But even there Peter and his band of brothers track him down, and beg him to go back to the house. Simply because still more people have arrived and are clamouring for his help!

Jesus knew, though, that it was impossible to help and heal every needy person. Yet it must have saddened and troubled him to think that whenever he moved on, as move on he must, he would be leaving some persons behind, who would still be feeling as miserable as Job. He would console himself with the thought that he would keep doing whatever he could for any needy person who came his way. He would keep telling them of God's *'amazing grace'*, i.e. of God's amazing and

unconditional love for them. But as well as telling them in powerful and challenging words about God's strong and constant love for them, he would keep showing them that love. BUT HOW? By his interest in, and attention to every troubled person pouring out their hearts in sobs and tears! By accepting them without any condemnation, by forgiving and encouraging them, and by removing the source of their misery!

Sometimes he set them free from their physical ailments and disabilities. Often he delivered them from their personal '*demons*' - their feelings of restlessness, worthlessness, failure, guilt and shame. Or from their '*demons*' of bad memories of the evil and ugly things they had done, or of the bad and ugly things that had been done to them. He would do whatever he could to put them back together again and to start living life to the full as they so desperately longed to do.

Our hope too is in the power and compassion of Jesus for us. He is alive in our midst all through our prayer together today. He is our way. Leave him and we may well get lost. He is our truth. Ignore him and his teachings and we may mess up our lives. He is our life. Turn our backs on him, and our spirits, minds and hearts, might just shrivel up and die.

But perhaps we are afraid that we have let our years crackle and go up in smoke, and have for so long left him out of our lives that it's just no use coming back to him. But surely if we cannot bring goodness to him, we can at least bring him our mistakes, our failures and our sins. And surely too we can bring him our trust, our renewed trust in him, not only as the Saviour of the world, but as our very own personal Saviour, who is still and forever our way, our truth, and our life!

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