

***FIRST IMPRESSIONS*** 5<sup>th</sup> IN ORDINARY TIME (B)  
Job 7: 1-4;6-7 Psalm 147 I Cor. 9: 16-19; 22-23 Mark 1: 29-39  
*By Jude Siciliano, OP*

Dear Preachers:

**PRENOTE:**

We have updated our “Justice Preaching” page with an essay on domestic violence by Brenda Walsh, OP. Sr. Brenda has also submitted a poem on St. Dominic, which you can find on our “Dominican Preaching” page. Go to [www.judeop.org](http://www.judeop.org) and click on the appropriate tabs on the left.

As I read Mark’s brief and animated gospel I am reminded of the musical, “Jesus Christ, Superstar.” The play (also made into a film) had a pounding pace with frenetic scenes of excited crowds pushing in on Jesus to touch him; crying out to him with pleas for help, “Do something!” The people were desperate, and they saw Jesus as the “superstar,” the one who could instantly help them. This gospel also reminds me of one of those old-time movies, with the characters moving in quick, jerky movements at twice the normal speed.

Jesus was just in the synagogue where his teaching was interrupted by the rants of a man possessed by an evil spirit. After he drives out the spirit, Jesus leaves the synagogue and, immediately upon entering the house of Simon and Andrew, he is taken to Simon’s mother-in-law who, we are told, “lay sick with a fever.” Jesus cures her, but there isn’t much time for him to rest because at sunset people bring him “all who were ill or possessed by demons” – and more, “The whole town was gathered at the door.” See what I mean, quick paced, frenetic activity caused by a desperate people who look upon Jesus as a miracle worker who can help them.

The gospel will show us that Jesus doesn’t want to be seen merely as a wonder worker. In order to get a break from all the hustle and find some quiet for prayer and reflection, he leaves very early in the morning for a deserted place. But Simon and his companions seem caught up in the frenzy, and they “pursued him.” The original language is reminiscent of hunters tracking down an animal. The disciples aren’t cast in a very flattering light in Mark’s gospel. They are like hunters. They want to find Jesus and bring him back to the crowds where he, and they by association, are the center of attention.

People who do various forms of ministry, paid or volunteer, hear this gospel and say, “My life too!” Are we ever off duty? Where is the time clock? When can we punch out and have a break from the many needs we encounter each day? Parents, teachers and those in the helping fields say the same thing. The good work we want to do seems to have no end in sight; our “to do” list has a lot more we need to check off. Jesus’ ministry doesn’t seem to have any clearly drawn lines; no demarcation that sets off his personal from his ministerial lives. Indeed, the needs for help follow him even into a synagogue. That’s what it feels like for many of us too.

Here is something else that is like us: most of Jesus’ ministry is conducted outside the sanctuary and “holy places.” His healings and good works take place in domestic settings: like the healing in Peter’s home, on the road, in a fishing boat, walking through a wheat field or on hillsides. Mark’s telling of the story of Jesus’ ministry sounds a lot like our own lives, with no strict lines of demarcation and few “off hours.” We are not part-time Christians and the call to serve can happen at any time and place in our day.

So, we feel like we are in “full time ministry.” We are conscious of a child’s needs which interrupt our schedule and plans; a friend’s recent biopsy; a neglected spouse; an aging parent needing doctor’s visits; a son’s wedding; a daughter’s breakup with her boyfriend; a shopping list and a meal to be prepared; a relative who got downsized; the tasks we need to do at our local parish and in our community, etc. We do see these and so much more, through the lens of ministry; in Christ’s name we feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick and imprisoned and preach the good news through our actions and words.

Mark’s gospel throws up cautions to disciples. He makes us aware that even the disciples closest to Jesus miss the fuller picture of who he was and what his mission would be like. They got sidetracked by Jesus’ popularity and the acclaim of the crowds. The disciples hear Jesus proclaim, “good news” and they think it is a crowd-pleaser that will bring them into power along with a popular Jesus – later James and John will ask him to sit at his right and left when he comes into his “glory” (11:37). Jesus has to remind those disciples that if they aspire to greatness, they must serve the rest. What kept Jesus so focused as his reputation spread throughout the land? What gave him perspective and balance as he wove through the wildly enthusiastic crowds of people reaching out to touch him and get the healings and help they needed?

It is too easy to say that he was the “Son of God” and so he knew exactly what he must do and say all the time. Mark stresses Jesus’ humanity, as we say in the fourth Preface at Mass, he was “like us in all things but sin.” When Jesus goes off to pray by himself to a “deserted place” away from the excitement of the crowds and the glory-seeking of his disciples, he seems to do so to get the focus he needs to continue doing the will of the One who sent him.

It is as if in prayer Jesus allows God to do for him what Jesus did for Simon’s mother-in-law. In the quiet places, as rare as they are for him in this gospel, Jesus would come to know again that God had a firm grasp on his hand and would never let go, even while he went through the depths of pain and humiliation at his crucifixion. Jesus’ going apart to pray doesn’t mean he will cut back and do less – not in Mark’s gospel! In fact, he has every intention of doing more as he tells Simon they must move on to other places to preach. But he is not deluded or seduced by his reputation; he knows exactly what he must do: he must go to Jerusalem.

We are not nuns or monks in cloisters. Still, we will need to find some quiet places, some mini-sabbaths, as Jesus did. We Christians have much to do as Jesus’ followers and we need to make space to allow God to reach out to us, quiet the fevers of our minds and hearts, so that we can return to our current places of service or, hear the call to the next places we must go. The pace of our lives probably will not change dramatically; there will continue to be temptations to lose focus and lean into success; there will always be the disciples’ temptation to shun the cross and, of course, there will be many deaths along the way – of loved ones, but also of our plans and dreams. But if today’s gospel is any indication, Jesus will never let go of our hands, never stop driving out the fevers of anxiety and burn-out, never stop raising us up – what he did for Simon’s mother-in-law assures us of that.

Jesus travels well and he is no longer trapped by the limits of time and place. He comes over to us now at this eucharistic celebration. He extends a hand to help us go further on our journey with him. He strengthens us in the area of life where we are trying to be more generous in service to others – as we also try to fulfill commitments we already have. This Eucharist is our coming aside for a while, not to a deserted place, but with a community of faith, people to whom Jesus is also extending a hand of support and encouragement.

## FAITH BOOK

*Mini-reflections on the Sunday scripture readings designed for persons on the run. "Faith Book" is also brief enough to be posted in the Sunday parish bulletins people take home.*

### From today's Gospel reading:

Simon's mother-in-law lay sick with a fever. They immediately told Jesus about her. He approached, grasped her hand, and helped her up.

### Reflection:

Jesus is no longer trapped by the limits of time and place. He comes over to us now at this eucharistic celebration. He extends a hand, as he did for Simon's mother-in-law, to raise us up from what would press us down and to help us go further on our journey with him.

### So, we ask ourselves:

- At this stage of our journey with Christ, how do we experience his hand reaching out to sustain us?
- Who is the outstretched hand of Christ for us?

## JUSTICE BULLETIN BOARD

***"Brothers and sisters; If I preach the gospel, this is no reason for me to boast, for an obligation has been imposed on me, and woe to me if I do not preach it!" (1 Cor. 9:16)***

We are all called to "preach the Gospel". St. Francis of Assisi challenges us in his words: ***"Preach the Gospel at all times. When necessary, use words"***. Each of us is called to live out the Gospel in such a way that our very lives, lived each day speak volumes about the Jesus whose "Good News" we follow and are called to proclaim.

We are especially called to preach the Gospel as a parish faith community. "A parish cannot really proclaim the Gospel if its message is not reflected in its own community life."

**"The parish must proclaim the transcendent message of the Gospel and help:**

- Bring "good news to the poor" in a society where millions lack the necessities of

life;

- Bring "liberty to captives" when so many are enslaved by poverty addiction, ignorance, discrimination, violence or disabling conditions;
- Bring "new sight to the blind" in a culture where the excessive pursuit of power or pleasure can spiritually blind us to the dignity and rights of others; and
- Set the downtrodden free; in communities where crime, racism, family disintegration, and economic and moral forces leave people without real hope.”

(US Catholic Bishops' *Communities of Salt and Light*)

### **What can you do?**

- Be part of the many ways Sacred Heart is "preaching the Gospel". Check the list of ministries in your bulletin and call the contact person to become part of one of Sacred Heart's many ministries.
- Pray that our parish will continue to "preach the Gospel" especially in our individual daily lives and in our life as a community.

(Submitted by Anne and Bill Werdel, from the parish bulletin of Sacred Heart Cathedral, Raleigh, N. C.)

## **POSTCARDS TO DEATH ROW INMATES**

*Inmates on death row are the most forgotten people in the prison system. Each week I post in this space several inmates' names and addresses. I invite you to write a postcard to one or more of them to let them know we have not forgotten them. If you like, tell them you heard about them through North Carolina's, "People of Faith Against the Death Penalty." If the inmate responds you might consider becoming pen pals.*

Please write to:

- Michael M. Reeves      #0339314    (On death row since 5/14/92)
- Eddie C. Robinson #0347839    (5/19/92)
- Ernest P. Mc Carver      #0264009    (9/23/92)

Central Prison    1300 Western Blvd.    Raleigh, N.C.    27606

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

Our webpage addresses: <https://www.PreacherExchange.com>

"First Impressions" is a service to preachers and those wishing to prepare for Sunday worship. It is sponsored by the Southern Dominican Province, U.S.A.

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Thank you.

“Blessings on your preaching”,

*Jude Siciliano, OP*

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