

**Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year B
(Feb. 8, 2009)**

Needy People

Needy people! I guess we have all experienced needy people at one time or another, haven't we? Well, today's readings are all about needy people, whether it's Job crying out in pain about his need for understanding or Paul expressing his need to preach the Gospel or all those people who come to Jesus with their illnesses and troubles looking for some relief, some hope, some cure.

It's a busy day in the life of Jesus that we hear about. No sooner has he left the synagogue where he had driven out a demon as we heard last week than he goes to Simon's house and finds Simon's mother-in-law ill with a fever. She needed help. He helped her. He cured her, and we are told immediately she got up and began to wait on them.

Then after dinner what had already been a busy day continues into the night. "They brought him all who were ill and those possessed by demons. Before long the whole town was gathered outside the door." He cured as many as he could that evening. Their enthusiasm must have grown at each blind one that saw, at each crippled one that walked, at each deaf one that heard, at each possessed one that got free, at each leg that stretched or lengthened.

When it was dark and he could do no more, the healed ones went home, and so did all those remaining sick ones hoping for tomorrow.

And what about Jesus? It had been a particularly active day and Jesus must have been jostled by the crowds. His compassion compelled him to continue healing and helping until he could do it no longer and he must have been exhausted.

Then there is that verse that I love. In the midst of all the activity, the hustle, the bustle, the cries for help, the cries of the demons, comes that wonderful, peaceful verse: "Early in the morning he went out to a desert place and there he was lost in prayer."

Jesus felt the need to pray. He too was a needy person. In his humanity he needed refreshing and strengthening and he sought it in

contact with the Father. I like to think that in that lonely place Jesus found the courage to accept the Father's will for him – and the courage to go ahead and do it.

It seems to have been difficult for him to find even those few quiet moments with the Father. Mark tells us that Simon and the others managed to track him down and came to him, saying, "Everybody is looking for you." And so the whole thing was about to begin again.

But this time Jesus says they have to go to other places and tell the good news of the kingdom there as well.

Well, it seems to me that if Jesus needed this special time to get in touch with the Father and to gain strength and courage for the work he had to do, how much more do we need the same thing? Our lives can sometimes seem hectic, too, and full of activity, full of burdensome responsibilities, needy people who come to us for help of one sort or another. There are times when we have to withdraw, to find our own lonely place, whether it be for only fifteen minutes a day or one day out of the month, or a week-long retreat during the year, to replenish our spirits, to remind ourselves of our call to be loving and compassionate as Jesus was.

We see Jesus at prayer like this in all the Gospels. Indeed Luke tells us that Jesus never makes an important decision without spending the night in prayer. What I find particularly intriguing is the pattern of moving from activity to prayer, as in this passage from Mark, and then back to activity again. It almost seems as though one feeds on the other. Jesus' activity leads him to contemplation, and contemplation leads him back to activity. It's a good pattern for us to follow as well. We should perhaps try to make a habit of ending our day with some kind of reflection on the day, recalling the good things that happened and how God was present there, recalling also the bad things that happened and wondering how they could be better informed by the presence of God the next day. We would then find ourselves imitating the prayer of Jesus and perhaps becoming better aware of God's presence and activity in our lives and in the world around us. And I feel certain that our own needs, our own weariness, would find comfort and healing in the assurance of that divine presence which calls us all to do what we can to bond with Jesus and with one another to heal the hurts and foster the hopes of this sometimes wounded, but always needy

world in which we live.