

Weekly Update from Father John Allison 2-1-18

Dear members and friends of our parish family,

On this upcoming Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany our Gospel reading (Mark 1:29-39) continues the story from the last two weeks of the beginning of Jesus' ministry. The story left off last week with Jesus, following his teaching in the synagogue, casting out a demon. We are told his fame began to spread throughout Galilee. This week, after Jesus and his disciples leave the synagogue they enter the house of Simon and Andrew. Simon's mother-in-law is in bed with a fever; Jesus goes to her, takes her by the hand and lifts her up. The fever leaves her and she immediately begins to serve Jesus and the disciples. It's important to note two key elements in this portion of the story. First, the detail that Jesus "lifted her up" is conveyed using the same Greek word for "lift" that is later used in Mark's Gospel to speak of Jesus being "raised" on the third day, the implication being that in being healed by Jesus this woman is raised to a new purpose. Far from being healed so that she can go about business as usual, she is healed, made whole, and begins her service to God's mission in Christ, which leads us to the second element that is important in our understanding of this event. Because of Simon's mother-in-law being lifted up by Jesus and her willingness to serve, she is sometime referred to as the first deacon. The word we translate as "serve" is the same as that used when the angels "waited on" Jesus in the wilderness (Mark 1:13) and the same Jesus uses to describe himself as "one who comes to serve" (Mark 10:45). It's in this spirit that Simon's mother-in-law embodies the ideal of discipleship as service to others, a mandate that Jesus requires of all his followers (Mark 8:34; 9:35; 10:43-45). As you reflect on this passage, consider how Jesus has lifted you up and empowered you to serve?

Epiphany themes of discipleship and manifestations of the power of God are also found in this coming Sunday's other readings. In the Old Testament passage the Prophet Isaiah proclaims the incomparable greatness and goodness of God (40:21-31). Written to provide assurance during Israel's time of exile in Babylon, the passage is structured around a series of rhetorical questions that offer reassurance that God has not forsaken his people. Our reading from Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians (9:16-23) echoes God's promise of fulfillment in service to the Lord as Paul seeks to help the community overcome divisions that have arisen between various factions, concluding with Paul's proclamation that he does it all "for the sake of the Gospel so that I may share in its blessings." I look forward to seeing you Sunday as I further explore these and other themes in my sermon.

I also want to announce that next week, Wednesday afternoon through Friday, I will be away for a short retreat at the Society of St. John the Evangelist. As some of you know this week's Feast of the Presentation marks the first anniversary of my ordination to the priesthood and I look forward to having some time away in prayer in contemplation as I reflect on the ways God has been active in my life and ministry this past year. Please pray for my safe travel and know that I give thanks to God for the very active role you have all played in our shared ministry as disciples.

Faithfully,

John+