

Epiphany 5 2/4/18
Mark 1:29-39 B

AND RISING VERY EARLY IN THE MORNING, WHILE IT WAS STILL DARK, HE DEPARTED AND WENT OUT TO A DESOLATE PLACE, AND THERE HE PRAYED.

How does that saying go? “There’s never a what is it again, around when you need him?” “There’s never pastor around when you need him”. That bum only works one day a week, right? “There’s never a cop around when you need one”? That’s the saying you are probably most familiar with, right? But how about this one: There’s never Jesus around when you need Him.” That’s what happened to the folks in Capernaum. One day, He’s healing the sick and casting out demons, the next morning – early in the morning when it’s still dark – poof -- He’s nowhere to be found! Come on, be honest, you can relate to that, can’t you? Especially, in the hour of trial, our feelings and emotions tell us Jesus has just abandoned us, left us all alone in this valley of the shadow of death, but OUR FAITH TREASURES AND BELIEVES THAT JESUS IS WITH US ALWAYS!

Today’s Gospel continues right where last week’s lesson left off. Last week, Jesus delivered the man from demon-possession in the synagogue in Capernaum. He taught and the people were amazed at His authority.

“And immediately,” the Evangelist tells us, “He left the synagogue and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.” As was the custom of that time and place, one of the members invited the teacher to a meal in his home. That is how Jesus came to be in the home of Simon. This is the same Simon whom Jesus had already called to be a disciple. Later on, Jesus would give Simon the name “Peter”.

“And immediately they told Him” about Peter’s mother-in-law, so sick with fever that she was unable to get out of bed. Once Jesus learned of the woman’s need, He “took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her.” Immediately, the woman was perfectly healthy in every way. We know how healthy she was because she began helping prepare and serve the meal to her healer, and four of His disciples. There was no convalescence – no resting up to regain strength after the fever left. She simply began to serve the guests in the house.

And, His miracles don’t stop there. Capernaum is not that big of a town. Word got out. Jesus had driven a demon out of a man in the synagogue and then gone to Simon’s house and healed his mother-in-law. News like that travels fast. As soon as the Sabbath was over, at sundown, the Evangelist tells us, “the whole city was gathered at the door”. And Jesus healed the sick and cast out the demons.

The next day promised to be even busier with healing and teaching. But when the next day came, Jesus was not to be found.

The Gospels tell us that Jesus went off to pray like this when He was under severe temptation. You will remember the Garden of Gethsemane. There He prayed, in light of His upcoming death, “Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will” (Mk 14:36). The temptation that Jesus faced was to abandon His mission by avoiding the cross. He could have walked away from it all ... the beatings ... the shame ... the crucifixion ... the death.

The TEMPTATION in today’s Gospel was for Jesus to avoid the cross and have popularity with man. There were great crowds flocking to Him. He was popular. Jesus could have lived out a long and happy life healing people in Capernaum ... maybe get married ... settle down ... start

a family. There didn't have to be any torture or crucifixion.

But that is not what He came into this world to do. He did not leave His throne above and take up human flesh in order to be popular, or famous, or wealthy, or powerful or anything like that. No, He came to overcome sin, death, and the power of the devil. He came to open heaven's gates to us. He came to do his Father's will and bring eternal life to all people.

So, Jesus went to the empty places ... away from the people. That is where He confronted His most severe temptations ... away from the crowds, but not alone ... for He prayed to God the Father in heaven.

II. The GOOD NEWS for us terminally ill with sin is that Jesus never gave in to temptation. He remained faithful to His mission. He remained "obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Ph 2:8). He carried the entire burden of the world's sin to a hill just outside Jerusalem. There He allowed Roman soldiers to nail Him to a cross. There He hung, carrying all of our sin, our burdens, our hurts, as His very own. It is our punishment that He endures. Even the Father abandons Him to the evils of hell. Because Jesus never gave in to the temptation to avoid the cross, He could cry out in triumph, "It is finished!"

Oh yes, Jesus did go away from us, to rest 3 days in the tomb. But, not even death and the grave could keep Him from us. He rose again from the dead. Now, He lives forever to be near to us, to cheer us, never to leave us, especially when cross and trial grieve us.

III. The GOOD NEWS for us, little lambs of the Good Shepherd's flock, is that our Lord Jesus knows and understands temptation all too well. He knows what it's like to have the father of all lies twisting and perverting the very Word of God to lead you into sin; to have that roaring lion prowling

around to devour you. He faced temptation, and so the Bible comforts us, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin” (He 4:15).

In the hour of trial, when the fight is fierce and the warfare long, the devil comes with his lies to work on your emotions and feelings to convince you that Jesus is gone, nowhere to be found. You know that feeling all too well don't you? The telephone rings and it's the doctor's office telling you the biopsy came back and it's cancer; you are stunned to learn of your spouse's unfaithfulness; your child wants nothing to do with you; you made that long walk from the graveside of your spouse to your empty home, and now the long, lonely nights just close in on you. And, you find yourself asking, wondering, “Where's Jesus?”

Faith believes His promise, “I am with you always.” You are baptized and live in Christ, and that means that because Jesus was abandoned by the Father, you will never be abandoned. Because He descended into hell, hell is a place you will never see. Because he lives, you shall live also.

The nation of Israel knew all about being dispirited. Their dreaded enemies, the Assyrians, took them captive and were oppressing them. They had **no** hope. They thought God had abandoned them. So, Isaiah comes to them, “But they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with sings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint” (Is 40:31).

Christ is with us to cheer us, to strengthen us, so that we do not lose hope. Always, always, in every joy and sorrow of earthly life, we hope in the Lord. He will take us to be with Him in heaven and He will wipe all the tears form our eyes. And on that great day that He comes again in all His

glory, He will raise our lowly bodies and change them to be like His glorious body, and we will have perfect healing from the sorrows and decay of earthly life. Until that day, He is with us to do His work in us through the hearing and learning of His Word, and in the Water and Word of our Baptism, and in giving us His body and blood to eat and drink. Through these means, He gives us faith and strength to overcome temptation and sin and despair so that we may run the race of faith to obtain the prize of everlasting life.