

Bishop Bradley's Reflections on the Sunday Readings

February 5, 2018 Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

The weather "roller coaster" has taken another dip and reminded us in very graphic ways that we are still in the midst of the winter season with frigid temps and multiple inches of snow overspreading our entire area. But something tells me that even these harsh weather conditions will not interfere with participating as planned in today's main event, and really the highlight of the winter season: *Super Bowl LII*. And while most of us have probably decided for which team between the "New England Patriots" and the "Philadelphia Eagles" we intend to cheer on to victory, it seems clear that for most people, the idea of getting together with family and friends for a mid-winter "party" is more of the focus than the actual game.

The Scripture Readings for today's Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time run the gambit of human emotions, from the discouragement and desolation we heard Job express in today's First Reading, to the enthusiasm and deep conviction to preaching the Gospel no matter what the challenges encountered as we heard from St. Paul in today's Second Reading, to the single-minded purpose of His mission as we heard Jesus articulate in today's Gospel Reading.

Job, who is a man of deep faith and trust in God's love for him, finds himself at the lowest possible moment in his life due to the catastrophic devastation he has experienced: the death of all his children, the loss of all his fortune, and his own personal sickness and suffering. And so, he says that "*man's life on earth is a drudgery...my life is like the wind; I shall not see happiness again*". That is reality in Job's life, and those sentiments might very well sum up the reality of many people's life experiences. Life can be painful, at times; but that is not the end of the story. That certainly was not the end of the story for Job, who, in spite of his suffering and pain, never gave up on God, and always trusted in God's Love and providential care.

Today's Psalm Refrain expresses that trustful sentiment so beautifully: "*Praise the Lord, Who heals the brokenhearted*".

St. Paul also demonstrates that trust. Paul, as we know, endured terrible sufferings, including shipwrecks, torture, and other painful afflictions; yet he not only never gave up on the Lord; he constantly placed his trust in the Lord. He used his sufferings as a kind of "spiritual energy" to help him to keep preaching the Good News of Jesus' Love and Mercy to all who would listen. As he said so beautifully in today's passage: "*I have become all things to all, to save at least some. All this I do for the sake of the Gospel.*"

And in today's Gospel passage we see Jesus in Capernaum where he had spent the morning in the synagogue preaching, and then coming to Peter's home for a little rest and refreshment, heals Peter's mother-in-law who was sick, and then after sunset, He healed all the sick and freed those possessed by evil spirits who came to Him. The really important point that St. Mark gives us is that very early the next morning, Jesus gets up and goes by Himself to spend time in prayer with His Father. That is what gave Him His spiritual energy, and that is what provided Him with the focus He needed to not get distracted from the main point of His mission, which as He told Peter when they came looking for Him, was: "*Let us go to the nearby villages that I may preach there also; for this purpose have I come.*"

If Job had stayed focused on how terrible his life was, there would be no reason for us to remember him 3,000 years later. The fact that he remained focused on his trust in God and God's promises to remain with him and to love him unconditionally is why we hold him in such

high regard. Similarly with St. Paul. He could have thrown in the towel at any point along the way and said "I've had enough!". But, in fact, he did the opposite because he trusted, and kept his eyes firmly fixed on his mission and what God was calling him to do.

That's the message for each of us today in the midst of whatever our life circumstances are at this very moment. We may find ourselves at one of the very "low points" of life, suffering because of any number of reasons; or we may find ourselves at a "high point", with everything going our way. But wherever we find ourselves, we need to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, and His Good News. It's important that we pay attention to today's Readings because we come to see that Job and Paul were faithful and committed people; and still they suffered greatly. So we too need to realize that our faith in Jesus will not necessarily spare us from suffering; but what faith in Jesus does do is to deliver us from cynicism and despair. Our faith in Jesus will ensure us that God will give us the graces we need to deal with those problems, and overcome them in God's good time.

And so, in the midst of these winter doldrums, let us pray that we will not be side-tracked or detoured by the distractions of our lives, including today's Super Bowl. There are so many more important things than which of those teams wins. May we today, with God's grace, choose once again to keep following Jesus, in the midst of the harsh realities of our life problems, right into the glory that God has in store for us when we complete our "super bowl" journey of faith in this world and get to the Victory awaiting us in Heaven, where we will find eternal happiness, joy and peace forever.

God bless you now and always!.