

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time – February 4, 2024

“Everyone is looking for you!” I’m sure you know that feeling some days ... job and family and other responsibilities can make 24 hours seem three times too short. And in a highly connected world, smartphones and social media can make us feel like we are always on call, at times overwhelmed by expectations. Maybe it’s even just by too many opportunities for things we might like to do but just don’t have the time. It is good to remember that there are also many people who suffer in the opposite way: in loneliness and isolation, where it seems like **nobody** is looking for them, nobody cares, where every day seems far too long. Whichever is the case, Job’s words still ring true – *life can seem a drudgery, marked with restlessness and trouble, hope so elusive, happiness so far away.*

We can add to our finances, our education, our circle of friends, our activities ... but the one fixed commodity that no one can make, sell, or buy, is TIME. Even Jesus, humbling Himself to come among us in our human condition, chose that limitation of living in time. We cannot somehow get MORE or LESS time; *we can only decide our priorities, how we will USE our time, what will get our attention and presence.* We NEED a balance of work and leisure and prayer and rest, of time alone and time with others. If we’re honest, there are times wasted on trivial things, letting important relationships and chores stagnate. *But often it is not really a choice between the worthy and the worthless, but rather choosing between several good, valuable options.* Time with children, or with spouse? Time for reading Scripture, or a work of charity? Time for people with us here and now, or time for people we have not seen for too long? That is where SOME of our time spent in prayer, reflection, and listening to God becomes essential; even Jesus, in His human nature, *needed this time apart to listen clearly to His Father and understand His purpose:* not just a preacher or prophet, not just a wonder-worker or healer, but the One sent to reveal the depth of divine mercy and love at the Cross.

Mark is right, of course ... whether intentionally or unconsciously, everyone IS looking for Jesus, because we all need what Jesus brings, a reason to live beyond the drudgery we all know from time to time. Jesus does not flee our human suffering, does not turn us away or avoid our problems. I am daily challenged by the fact that Jesus chose to spend most of His time with the kind of people we might prefer to avoid – the sick, the troubled, the suffering, *people with problems*. Though she is not named, Simon's mother-in-law teaches the pattern of discipleship ... to be healed and then in gratitude, to serve ... receiving a gift from Jesus that we want to share so others can also benefit.

“Everyone is looking for you” remains true of Jesus; but in an even deeper sense, *Jesus has come, looking for us, for every one*. We look for Him not only in prayer and sacrament; we also need to look for Christ in the people around us, in those we take for granted or those we are just too busy to notice, especially those for whom life seems like a drudgery. The time we have this day, this week, is God's gift to us, as stewards of the Gospel, like St. Paul. Pick one or two things you will do with that time to show someone else, whether a stranger or someone you see every day, that the love and mercy of Jesus are still alive in our world. Do such small things matter? Out of each small tile in a mosaic, each thread in the tapestry, each note in the orchestra, the beauty of the whole is revealed; and so it is with the Kingdom of God.