

Thirtieth Sunday, October 23, 2011

World Mission Sunday

Fr Gary Howley SPS

National Director, *World Missions, Ireland* – the work of the Pontifical Mission Societies

First Reading: Exodus 22:20-26

This reading underlines the compassion the vulnerable long for. The people of Israel are asked to remember their own needy history and respond in their turn with the compassion of God. It is hard to fathom how anyone who has been in need could later become hard-hearted towards those whose in similar need. While this is a paradox of the human condition – it is not God's way; God wishes to lighten our burdens, not increase them.

Second Reading: 1 Thessalonians 1: 5-10

Paul marvels at the dynamism of the Christian community in Thessalonica. Though he must have been pleased with his role as a missionary to them, he acknowledges the primary work of the Holy Spirit in leading them to Christ. In our own day, we hear wonderful stories from around the world of how Christian communities find life and hope in their togetherness in faith, and we too pray for and thank God for such blessings.

Gospel: Matthew 9:1- 8

Have you ever noticed how many people respond to winning a competition or the Lotto or some other contest with the words, "I can't believe it!" Though they long for the win and may work very hard for the success, there is a sense in which they don't really expect it.

This was not the case with "some people" who appeared bringing their paralytic friend to Jesus. We don't know anything about them or how they were affected by their visit to Jesus that day, but they got what they came for and went home with their friend healed.

Homily Notes

What is striking about today's Gospel is not so much that Jesus healed the paralytic – though that must have been a wondrous event for him and his family – but that Jesus named his friends as people of faith. "Seeing their faith", the Gospel records, Jesus healed their friend. The faith of his friends proved to be a blessing for the paralytic and that is good news for us today.

In Jesus' time, many viewed sickness as a punishment from God. Jesus began the healing in today's story with forgiveness and there was a rabbinic tradition that this is how healing began. The religious authorities of the time, represented in today's Gospel by the scribes, were not happy with Jesus: forgiving sins was God's work! Jesus, on the other hand, wanted to display God's forgiveness. Jesus felt the burden of those who were estranged from God and the consequences of this negative element in their lives, which could result in sickness of one kind or another. Jesus wanted to heal both soul and body.

The God of Jesus does not condemn people in their misery, but rather feels their pain and longs for their forgiveness and healing. The qualities of forgiveness and healing Jesus hopes for in his followers are those he has learnt from his Father and he wants his followers, gathered together in faith, to be ministers of these gifts. In God's kingdom, neither sin nor illness has the last word and Jesus proclaims this as good news to us today.

Perhaps, like the paralytic, we in Ireland may feel helpless at the moment. Yet, as we celebrate this World Mission Sunday, there are countless people throughout the world who are bringing us to Jesus in prayer. They are asking a blessing for us because of the work of our missionaries and all who have supported them over the years. They thank God for us and pray his forgiveness and healing for us. They don't do this lightly, but in faith and trust that God is at work in our lives bringing salvation and joy in Jesus Christ.

We celebrate our faith today in the one who heals us from all that would separate us from God. We remember and are grateful for those, like the paralytic's friends, who support us on our journey to Jesus and who are living examples of what it means to be *together in faith*.

– end –