

## The Fifth Sunday of Ordinary Time (Year B)

<i>First Reading</i>	Job 7:1-4, 6-7
<i>Response</i>	He heals the brokenhearted
<i>Psalm</i>	Psalm 147:1-2, 3-4, 5-6
<i>Second Reading</i>	1 Corinthians 9:16-19, 22-23
<i>Gospel Acclamation</i>	“He took our infirmities and bore our diseases.”
<i>Gospel</i>	Mark 1:29-39

The fifth Sunday for Ordinary Time for year B continues our journey through Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians. In this case, we skip ahead to 1 Corinthians 9 and some of Paul’s famous words, his self-description, his self-understanding of his apostleship and his call to preach the Gospel...his call to evangelize—the process and the call to evangelization that Paul was so famous for that he actually became known as “The Apostle.”

So the reading from today is 1 Corinthians 9:16-19, 22-23. Now, as usual, I’m going to read all the verses that the lectionary gives, but I’m actually also going to read the verses that the lectionary skips. So this is one of those times where the lectionary gives us a passage from Paul and excises a couple of verses. Again, I’m not always sure—sometimes I can kind of guess—why these verses have been cut out, but in this case, it’s a little less clear to me. But I’m going to include them, because I think they’re helpful again for giving us a little bit of context to what Paul is saying as he’s describing his own concept of his apostleship and his call to evangelize. So in 1 Corinthians 9:16, we read these words:

For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward; but if not of my own will, I am entrusted with a commission. What then is my reward? Just this: that in my preaching I may make the gospel free of charge, not making full use of my right in the gospel.

For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more.

And here, the verses that the lectionary skips but I'm going to read them:

To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews; to those under the law I became as one under the law—though not being myself under the law—that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law—not being without law toward God but under the law of Christ—that I might win those outside the law.

And then the lectionary picks up here, verse 22:

To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.<sup>1</sup>

Okay, so what's going on here? There are a few things that we want to highlight in order to understand Paul's words. First, Paul is giving us an explanation here of his teaching and preaching of the Gospel. Now whenever you see that word Gospel, as I've said elsewhere, the Greek word is *euangelion*. It literally means "good message" or "good news." So for Paul, the good message is the good message of Jesus' coming. It's the coming of the Son of God and His passion, death, resurrection, and ascension into Heaven.

And so he's bringing that good news, that Gospel, to people throughout the world. And he says here that the reason he's doing it is because necessity has been laid upon him. The Greek word there, *anangkē*, for "necessity"...sometimes it can actually be used as to mean "distress." So a time of *anangkē* is a time of necessity, a time of distress.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible citations/quotations herein are from *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*. New York: National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, 1994.

When I was writing my dissertation, my doctrinal dissertation, that word was used to describe the eschatological tribulation—this time of suffering and distress that would precede the coming of the Messiah. So Paul here isn't just talking about some kind of abstract necessity. He's talking about an existential necessity—a burden that's laid upon him. He *has* to preach the Gospel. He's driven to preach the Gospel. He even says:

Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! (1 Corinthians 9:16c)

Now, in the New Testament, when you say the word “woe”, *ouai* in Greek, it's basically a kind of a curse. So it's not just a warning; it's kind of a curse. So when Jesus says:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! (Matthew 23:15a)

That is one of the most severe warnings that he can give them. And in a sense, it's the opposite of the Beatitudes. So blessed are the meek, blessed are the poor in spirit...those are His blessings. The curses, so to speak, that He utters are in the form of this rhetorical phraseology of “woe to you” or “woe to me.” So basically, Paul here is saying that he, in a sense, stands under a curse if he doesn't preach the Gospel. He *has* to do it. He *has* to evangelize. That's his mission; that's what he's been called to do.

Now, he says:

For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward; but if not of my own will, I am entrusted with a commission. (1 Corinthians 9:17)

So obviously, Paul is erring on the second side of that phraseology. He's leaning toward the second half of that sentence. He believes that he's been entrusted with a commission from God. He isn't just freely choosing to preach the Gospel. He's been *called* by God, through the revelation of Jesus Christ His Son.

You can think here of the appearance of Christ on the road to Damascus, where Jesus says not only to Paul:

“Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”

He also entrusts him with a mission to go and preach, to bring the good news—not just to Israel but also to the nations. So Paul is describing his commission here. Now in the context of describing that, he says something interesting here:

What then is my reward?

Just this: that in my preaching I may make the gospel free of charge, not making full use of my right in the gospel.

What’s Paul talking about, his right in the Gospel and making the Gospel free of charge? Well, this is one of those times where if you take the verse out of context, you might not understand what he’s referring to. But if you back up to the beginning of the chapter, in 1 Corinthians 9:1 and following, Paul here is responding to some criticism that he’s apparently received. Some people have been challenging both his status as an apostle and also some of the rights he exercises as an apostle. And one of the rights that apparently the apostles could exercise is that they would preach the Gospel, and then they would have the right to refrain from working for a living. In other words, they would be subsidized by the generosity of others so that they could preach the Gospel.

So you actually see this all the way back in the Gospel of Luke. You remember Luke 8:1-3, Jesus is going around preaching the Gospels, and it says that there were some women who had traveled with him—Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and others:

...who provided for them out of their means. (Luke 8:3b)

So these were wealthy women who had money, who could provide for Jesus and the apostles—for their food, clothing, whatever, shelter, whatever they needed—as they devoted themselves entirely to the mission of preaching the Gospel.

And so that model of having the right to not work for a living is something that's part of the apostolic, so to speak, deposit. It's part of the apostolic tradition. It's something Jesus practiced. It's something the apostles practiced.

But Paul, you might recall, doesn't make use of that right. We see this in the book of Acts, which describes him as a tentmaker. And we see it elsewhere in his letters when he talks about the fact that he would work with his hands in order to support himself, by making tents. That was a skill set that he had that he could bring with him as he traveled throughout the Mediterranean world. So some people are challenging Paul, because he doesn't look like the other apostles look. And it's interesting here, he actually says, if you go back to chapter 9, verse 1—this isn't in the lectionary, but it gives you a little bit of context. He says:

Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are not you my workmanship in the Lord? If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

This is my defense to those who would examine me. Do we not have the right to our food and drink?

He goes on to say this is in verse 7:

Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Who tends a flock without getting some of the milk?

Then if you skip down to verse 13, he says:

Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.

And here he's alluding to Jesus' statement when He sends the apostles out in the Gospel of Luke:

...for the laborer deserves his wages... (Luke 10:7c)

But Paul is saying here:

But I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing this to secure any such provision. For I would rather die than have any one deprive me of my ground for boasting. For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting.

And that's when he goes on to the verse for today. So notice, what's Paul doing? In effect, what he's saying is he's responding to criticisms of his apostleship. Because unlike some of the other apostles, he doesn't make his living by the Gospel; he makes his living by building tents. The reason that he's doing that is he doesn't want to put any obstacle whatsoever in the way of the Gospel being heard. So he's going to pay his own way as he journeys around the Mediterranean world, preaching the Good News.

Now, that's his reference there to his right. But what about the other things Paul says here? If you go back to the reading for today, verses 20-21 were omitted. And I want to address those here, because the other aspect of Paul's apostleship that he highlights is its universality. Notice what Paul says here:

To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews...

To those outside the law I became as one outside the law... (1 Corinthians 9:20a, 21a)

In other words, to the Gentiles I became as a Gentile. Why does he do this? Why does he adapt to the people to whom he's preaching the Gospel? It's really simple:

I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. (1 Corinthians 9:22b)

Okay, so what's Paul talking about here? Here Paul is describing his method of evangelization, his method of preaching the Gospel as both universal and, we

might say, inculturated. It's a modern term, but it's an accurate one for what Paul's doing. In other words, Paul is going to bring the Good News to anyone who will listen. His mission is both to Jews and to Gentiles, so this is really important. Sometimes people think of Paul as *just* the apostle to the Gentiles, because that's how he describes himself on various occasions. But when Paul calls himself the apostle to the Gentiles, he doesn't mean that he's not also bringing the Good News to his brother and sister Jews, to his fellow Israelites.

In fact, if you look at the Acts of the Apostles—if you start in chapter 8 with the conversion of Paul and you go all the way through to chapter 28—every time Paul goes to a new city to preach the Good News, he always goes first to the synagogue, preaches to his fellow Jews, and then only once he's been rejected by some or all of the people in the synagogue does he then turn and bring the Gospel to the pagans. So at the beginning of Romans, Paul says:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel...to the Jew first and also to the Greek.  
(Romans 1:16)

So too, Paul is describing his evangelism now in 1 Corinthians 9:

To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews...

To those outside the law I became as one outside the law...

...that I might by all means save some.

Now this is going to come up later in the letter to the Corinthians when Paul deals with the question of eating food sacrificed to pagan idols or not. But for now, I just want you to see the universality of his mission and also the idea of inculturating it. In other words, Paul is going to adapt the way he preaches the Gospel to whether his audience is Jewish or whether his audience is pagan. He's going to adapt the message, so that he delivers it in the best way possible for a Jewish audience to hear it and for a Gentile audience to hear it.

And you can actually see this if you look at his different letters. You can't prove this, but I can't help but notice that there is evidence in Paul's letter to the Romans, for example, that there was a large Jewish population in Rome, a large Jewish Christian population in Rome—Priscilla and Aquila are two of the examples of Jewish Christian believers who came from Rome who were friends with Paul—to whom Paul is writing a letter to the Romans. Whereas when you look at the Church at Corinth, it appears to be predominantly—if not exclusively—of Gentiles.

Well, when you read the letters to the Corinthians—I mean, it's complicated, but that's because it's Paul. But it's really straightforward and easy to understand. But when you read Paul's letter to the Romans, and you look at the kind of fancy, rhetorical moves that he's making...the kind of arguments from Scriptures that he's using...the Rabbinic methods of scriptural interpretation and argumentation that Paul's using...one of the reasons Romans is so complicated is because he seems to be writing it with a Jewish readership as well as a Gentile readership in mind. In other words, he's not just writing for recently converted pagans like he's doing here in Corinthians, but he's writing for any Jewish or Jewish Christian readers who might get their hands on the text.

So the point is that Paul adapts the Gospel to the audience to whom he is preaching it. And the reason he does that is really simple: it's not to be two-faced. It's not to soften or water down the Gospel. It's for the sake of salvation.

I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. (1 Corinthians 9:22b)

Alright, so beautiful description there, a kind of window into Paul's apostolic heart, to his missionary heart. And as I was reading that passage from Paul, especially his statement about the necessity of evangelization—the burden to evangelize—it made me think of a section from Pope Francis' Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, which is actually...the English title is called *The Joy of the Gospel*. And it's an Apostolic Exhortation that the pope wrote in the wake of the synod on the New Evangelization that Pope Benedict XVI had actually called for but which actually was held under the pontificate of Pope Francis.

And if you read *Evangelii Gaudium: The Joy of the Gospel*, you'll get a real clear overview and introduction to Pope Francis as a person, but also his understanding of the Gospel and of the mission and nature of the Church with regard to the New Evangelization that was called for by Pope John Paul II, as well as Pope Benedict XVI.

And so in *The Joy of the Gospel*, the Holy Father says this about evangelization and about the necessity of evangelization. And he says something fascinating. He says that evangelization is not necessary just for great saints and apostles like Paul, but for every single baptized Christian. Listen to what Pope Francis says:

In all the baptized, from first to last, the sanctifying power of the Spirit is at work, *impelling us to evangelization... In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples* (cf. Mt 28:19). All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization, and it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients. *The new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized. Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization; indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God's saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love.* Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are “disciples” and “missionaries”, but rather that we are always “missionary disciples”.

So he puts those two terms together.

If we are not convinced, let us look at those first disciples, who, immediately after encountering the gaze of Jesus, went forth to proclaim him joyfully: “We have found the Messiah!” (Jn 1:41). The Samaritan woman became a missionary immediately after speaking with Jesus and many Samaritans come to believe in him “because of the woman’s testimony” (Jn 4:39). So

too, Saint Paul, after his encounter with Jesus Christ, “immediately proclaimed Jesus” (Acts 9:20; cf. 22:6-21). So what are we waiting for?<sup>2</sup>

Alright, so that’s from *Evangelii Gaudium*, paragraph 119-20. Now, I don’t know about you, but several aspects of that...it’s a lengthy quote, but they stood out to me as really important. First, notice what the Holy Father is saying here, that evangelization is not something for “professionals,” whether that be professional missionaries in the sense of belonging to a missionary order or people like myself who are engaged in theology (study of theology, philosophy, the teaching of the faith)...whatever it might be...writers, theologians. No. Evangelization is for every single baptized Christian. That’s the first point. All baptized Christians by virtue of the Great Commission are called to be missionary disciples. First point.

Secondly, of course the immediate response, the immediate rejection people will have to that is they’ll say: “Well, I don’t have any training. How can I possibly evangelize other people?” And the Holy Father here gives really great examples from the Scripture of people—whether they be the disciples or St. Paul or my favorite here is the Samaritan woman—who begin sharing the Good News immediately after they’ve encountered Jesus, because the heart of the Good News that they’re sharing is their own testimony, their own personal encounter with Christ.

I’ve written on this elsewhere, but if you look at the Samaritan woman, she’s a perfect example of this. She moves from being in a state of public and permanent adultery (or fornication)—living with a man who she’s not even married to—through after encountering Christ, going to her people in the Samaritan village and saying, “Let me tell you about the man who told me everything that I ever did.” And it says:

Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony... (John 4:39a)

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<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* no. 119-20

So I would suggest, if you look at her as a model, especially for lay people who don't have the office of apostle like Peter or Paul, the principal mode of evangelization for the lay person living in the world is precisely that—*martyria*, “testimony.” In other words, bearing witness to who Christ is and what He's done in your own life.

“Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?” (John 4:29)

That's what she said. That's all she says, but those two things—her testimony to who He is, her invitation to discover who He is, and then her testimony to what He's done in her own life—are motives of credibility for believing. And they lead other people to faith.

So the final point there I want to highlight is Pope Francis' terminology of missionary disciples. So you may have seen this in recent writings, but I think it's actually a very effective summary of how St. Paul for sure envisions Christians. It's so easy—especially in modern, western Christianity—for us to talk about being a Christian as purely an intellectual exercise. For example, you'll frequently hear people describe Christians as “believers.” In other words, there are these set of truths which the Christian faith proposes, and I accept them. So you might even hear them say, “I am an Orthodox Catholic.” In other words, “I accept all the truths that the Church teaches.”

But it's one thing to be a believer, and it's another thing to be a missionary disciple. Because a missionary disciple has two elements to it. A disciple is a student, so it's someone who not only believes the faith but studies it and learns it. And then missionary is someone who takes that faith and then shares it with others. And that's really what Pope Francis is calling every Catholic, every Christian, to be in *The Joy of the Gospel*. And it's also what Paul is describing in the reading for today. Because what does he say?

For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. (1 Corinthians 9:16b, 22b)

That's really the heart of missionary discipleship. You see it right there in 1 Corinthians 9. And it really should be the heart of every single Christian who wants to go out into the world and bear witness to who Christ is and what He's done in our lives.