

5th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B

Job 7:1-4, 6-7

Psalm 147:1-2, 3-4, 5-6

1 Corinthians 9:16-19, 22-23

Mark 1:29-39

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Job asks, "Is not our life on earth a *drudgery*? Are not our days those of a hireling? We are slaves who long for the *shade* -- laborers who long for their *wages*." I think even the most cheerful, upbeat person would have to admit that Job has a point.

When I was an undergraduate, I spent my summers working in a hot dog factory, and in a shoe distribution warehouse. Among other benefits, these jobs gave me my first real adult experience of clock-watching. As I heaved another fifty pound block of frozen fat into the meat-grinder, or shipped another case of ladies pumps to Schenectady, I'd glance up at the clock on the wall, and be appalled to realize that less than five minutes had passed since I'd *last* looked.

Then I'd get angry with myself, thinking, "You're young and you've got only one life. It's perverse to be wishing for another hour and another day to be *over*." But wish I did. If I wasn't precisely a slave longing for the shade, I *was* a hireling longing for the coffee break. And I was certainly a laborer who waits for his wages.

All the while, I was aware that I was privileged. I had hopes of continuing my studies. Few of my fellow workers were so fortunate. All these years later, some of the men and women I worked with are probably still grappling with the recalcitrant sausage machine, and unloading freight cars of Taiwanese sandals -- still watching the same clock -- that is if they

haven't been laid off and the plants shut down.

Financial worries, and fears about job security, can be *worse* than drudgery. They cause sleepless nights. Job knows *that* kind of anxiety as well: "Troubled nights have been told off for me. If in bed I say, 'When shall I arise?' then the night drags on; I am filled with restlessness until the dawn."

If people are *fortunate*, they start their adult lives with a small house and a large mortgage, and end it years later with a large house and a small mortgage -- and a feeling that they've missed something -- that there must be something more. So, I think, on a bad day, we can all empathize with Job when he complains, "My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle; they come to an end without hope. Remember that my life is like the wind; I shall not see happiness again.

It was ever thus. In our Gospel, Jesus cures some people who are ill, and frees others from their demons. Before long the *whole town* was gathered outside the door. When he finally escapes to a lonely place, his disciples track him down and tell him "*Everybody* is looking for you." *Every person in the town* has illnesses to be cured and demons to be exorcized. They suspect that Jesus is the solution to their predicament. In this, at least, they are right. Jesus is the answer -- to their troubles, and to ours.

What *is* his solution? Prayer, and proclaiming the good news. The gospel tells us that Jesus rose early in the morning, went off to a lonely place, and "was *absorbed in prayer*." After praying he went on to "*proclaim the good news*." In prayer, especially our community prayer, our persistent belief that there must be something *more* to life, finds its confirmation. In Jesus we have hope of ultimate victory over death, and

over the drudgery and anxiety that can make life seem like a *living* death.

Our Baptismal obligation to *proclaim* this good news lends our life purpose. We proclaim it in our *words*, but also in the way we sustain faith and hope in our everyday lives. Then people will be attracted to us, because they will begin to suspect that we've got some answers -- that we've discovered the "something more" for which everyone yearns. And as they come to know us, they will realize that our "something more" is Christ. Christ, who can also be theirs.