

2021- 5TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, FEBRUARY 6
& 7, 2021

The Difference the Presence of Christ makes

Christ took away our infirmities and bore our diseases"(Matthew 18:17)

Dear brothers and sisters

What would man's life have been without Christ? Borrowing from the Philosopher Thomas Hobbes' description of the state of nature, it will be "short, nasty and brutish." How does the presence of Christ make a difference? Do you remember how the people in the synagogue, after witnessing the exorcism and powerful teaching of our Lord ask what is this? A new teaching with authority. This is how the presence of Christ makes a difference. Things that are considered impossible become possible. When Christ is present darkness and distress take flight because he is the light of the world.

Continuing, the gospel takes us to our Lord's visit to the first pope's family. On entering the house, he saw Peter's mother-in-law, who was sick with fever and he healed her. She rose and waited on him. Jesus healed many other sick people and exorcised many possessed people. Who, besides Jesus, is the one doing all this?

Earlier, in the beginning of the gospel, John had introduced our Lord as the mighty and the anointed

One. He said, "One mightier than I, is coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; he will baptize you with the holy Spirit" (Mark 1:7-8). The voice of the Father confirmed this saying to our Lord, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11). The passage from Mark's gospel, read last Sunday, indicated that as soon as our Lord entered Capernaum darkness and gloom took flight from that land. The first place he went on his arrival in Capernaum was the synagogue where he not only preached with authority, but exorcised a man afflicted with unclean spirit from there he went to Peter's home. By performing mighty signs beginning with raising Peter's mother-in-law from her sickbed, our Lord confirmed that this is not business as usual. "Something greater than the temple is here" (Matthew 12:6).

Through his teaching and miracles, our Lord brought an explosion of joy and hope. How can we understand the first reading? How does the newness in the gospel compare with this somber statement in the first reading, "Is not man's life on earth a drudgery? Are not his days those of hirelings? I am filled with restlessness until dawn" (Job 7:1, 4).

These words from Job reflect those of a man who had no hope and no vision which faith in Christ brings. Being of the Old Testament era, Job had not encountered Christ. Eventually, Job persevered and did not succumb to sin. He bore stoically the relentless trial and torture inflicted on him by the devil. Had he known the presence of Christ, he would not have questioned the Father, saying, "Why do

you not pardon my offense, or take away my guilt?(Job 7:22).

Had Job known the power of the cross of Christ, he would have had a different perspective on the anguish and trials he suffered. It would have been clear to him that the suffering of the present is as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18). He would have seen his trials in the light of the cross. He would have known that the cross is a proof of God's power for salvation. Or as St Cyril of Jerusalem put it, "The cross is the crown of victory! It has brought light to those blinded by ignorance. It has released those enslaved by sin. Indeed, it has redeemed the whole of mankind!" Our God heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds" (Psalm 147:3). The presence of God in Christ makes all things beautiful again. "Whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come. And all this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and given us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:17-18)

Knowing Jesus and believing him makes all things new. The presence of Christ makes a great difference. In Christ, God is no longer the great unknown. He revealed the face of God. William Barclay, a New Testament Bible scholar put it this way, "Until Jesus came, men could only guess and grope after God." Job bore testimony to this when he said, "O that I knew where I might find him" (Job 23:3).

Before the restoration of his fortunes, Job's trials gave a glimpse of the state of man's life without the grace of Christ. Such life is unlivable, death is preferred. That is why Job said, "Why did I not die at birth, come forth from the womb and expire? Why did knees receive me, or breasts nurse me?"(Job 3:11-12).

Am I implying that once you know and love Christ that you will have only prosperity, peace and free pass on life's challenges and trials?.Of course not. The message is that in Christ our tears and sorrows are transformed into the currency for eternal joy and blessedness. Our sufferings acquire new meanings in Christ Jesus. They are bridges to glory which no eyes have seen, and no ears have heard, nor had it entered the heart of man (See Isaiah 64:3, 1Cor. 2:9). There is no end of the road or point of no return in Christ Jesus. In and through Christ, cross is the ladder to heaven. The difference the presence of Jesus makes is man's eternal salvation.

"The Good News of Christ continually renews the life and culture of fallen man; it combats and removes the error and evil which flow from the ever-present attraction of sin. It never ceases to purify and elevate the morality of peoples. It takes the spiritual qualities and endowments of every age and nation, and with supernatural riches it causes them to blossom, as it were, from within; it fortifies, completes, and restores them in Christ" (GS 58 § 4., CCC2527). Without the presence of Jesus, there will be no world, no Church, culture and university.

On his own, Man cannot achieve this. efforts of technology, however useful they may be, cannot calm man's anxieties. This is why we must preach the gospel in season and out of season. "Woe to me if I do not preach it!" (1 Corinthians 9:16).