

Year B, Epiphany 5
Isaiah 40:21-31
Psalm 147:1-13, 21c
1 Corinthians 9:16-23
Mark 1:29-39

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May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be always acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer. *Amen.*

When Jesus healed Simon's mother-in-law, she got up and began to serve them. She was just like millions of women and men all over the world, from her day to ours. Here's how the story might go in our time:

Every year the matriarchs of the church would help put on a church dinner. Truthfully, they didn't just help put it on, they ran the show. There were five of them, all getting up in years, but this was their work and they had no intention of giving it up anytime soon.

One year one of them had to have a hip replacement the week of the dinner. On the day before the dinner was to take place, her priest went by to check on her.

"They're not using boxed potatoes, are they?" she demanded. "The people who come expect potatoes made from scratch."

"They're planning to peel potatoes all morning," the priest told her.

"And the ham? Did they get a good dry ham, or the watery kind?"

The priest honestly didn't know, but imagined it was the same ham as always. He asked if she had always enjoyed cooking, and to his surprise, she adamantly answered "no," that "cooking was a big chore."

"Really?" he said. "I thought you enjoyed doing this."

"I don't love the potatoes," she said. "Really, young man, you should know I love Christ, and there are only so many ways a body can do that."

Sometimes love is hard to define, and so is the way we express it. This is especially true in the way love affects our spirit and our spirituality. Spirituality, or the act of being spiritual, means different things to different people. Despite these differences, every one of us has our own way of relating to spiritual matters—the way in which we concern ourselves with our values and ideals.

St. Augustine called this *ordo amoris*, or an "ordering of our loves." Our spirituality is formed by who and what we love, and the way we express that love in our time, energy, and in our relationships. Think for just a minute about who and what you love. I love my family. I love God. I love, love, love chocolate, I love my work, I love the spring and the fall... You get my point, I think. We love lots of different things, but whatever is most important to us is reflected in our lives in ways we may not even realize—whether we're Christians or Jews or Muslims, or even if we live without the blessings of religious beliefs.

Our spirituality goes far beyond what we profess to believe. It's evident in the *way* we reveal what we profess. As Christians it's our love for Christ that should come shining through. If we nurture our love for Christ, the way we order the loves of our life is very evident. A friend once told me that her mother taught her that people see who you are by the way you live, and that there were two things she shouldn't have to tell people about herself: one is that she's a lady, and other is that she's a Christian. It should be noticeable in everything she does and in the way she does them.

In this wonderful season after Epiphany, scripture reminds us over and over again about how God has called and equipped God's children since ancient days—since creation. We've recently heard stories of Samuel and Jonah and Moses from the Old Testament, how they heard God's call and how they responded. Do you remember how Jonah acted? He was bound and determined to do God's work his own way and went great lengths to circumvent God's instructions, both in his actions and his attitude.

In Mark's Gospel, we've heard about the beginning of Jesus' ministry, how he called the disciples who dropped everything when he said "follow me," seemingly without giving it a second thought. In Jesus' own story, we find the most important lesson about call and response, and about listening for God's still small voice, about being open to God's Spirit, about being obedient and faithful. Last week we heard the first of Mark's stories about our Lord's healing miracles, and in today's Gospel we hear how Jesus healed Simon's mother-in-law, cured many people who were sick, cast out demons, and how the whole city gathered around while he did it. Afterward, Mark tells us, Jesus went to a deserted place and there he prayed. That is how Jesus kept his words and his work connected with what God desired for him to do. It's important for us to learn from his example.

At our Annual Meeting last December, we elected and commissioned three new vestry members. Since then, each of them, along with the returning vestry members, has committed to work within a specific service or ministry area in our parish. In turn, they are relying on the rest of us to make similar commitments. The work here does not belong to any one person, or even to the church. It is God's work. We don't have to be officially asked to do it, nor should we expect to be officially recognized for it, although I hope that we remember to thank each other from time to time. The work we do within the church and through the church comes from the commitment we've made as members of the body of Christ in our baptismal covenant: to proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ, to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbors as ourselves; to strive for justice and peace among all people and to respect the dignity of every human being.

The calling of the disciples and the busyness of those first episodes in Jesus' ministry are appropriate reminders for as we work together here at St. Francis. There are so many opportunities awaiting us, and sometimes responding to them stretches us to the limits because we all have other things to do, other commitments to keep, and other responsibilities to fulfill. There are times for each of us when we think we're just too busy to stop and pray, that we don't have time to nurture our relationship with Christ. And sometimes, we simply may not *want* to do the work we've been given to do here. Those are the times when we, like Jesus, need to go to a deserted place and tend to what we say is important in our lives.

One of my favorite stories is about a group of Europeans who had hired some natives to carry supplies and lead them into the interior of the Belgium Congo. For several days they pressed forward at a rapid pace. Then one morning as the European group awakened and made ready for the day, they found that the natives were just sitting quietly, making no movement, no effort to gather things for the day's hike. When asked what was going on, the natives said simply that they had been traveling so fast in the last few days that they had gotten ahead of their souls and were going to stay quietly in camp for the day in order that their souls could catch up with them.

In the words of the prophet Isaiah,
Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength,
They shall mount up with wings like eagles,
They shall run and not be weary,
They shall walk and not faint.

When we nurture our spirit through prayer and time with God, when we let our souls catch up with us, we'll find the power, the energy, and the endurance to do all that God has given us to do. And even better, we'll find joy and happiness in doing it. *Amen.*