

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

The differences between the healing of Peter's mother-in-law and the other healing stories in the first chapter of Mark's Gospel are striking. Rather than in a public space and in front of crowds this personal healing occurs in the privacy of Peter's house. By contrast to the command for the demons to be gone, in his bedside ministry Jesus never mentions a demon and uses no words. Instead he gently takes her by the hand and helps her to her feet. Unlike the others Jesus heals, of whom we never hear about their response, the healing of Peter's mother-in-law leads her to an act of service. Given all the details Mark give us of this encounter it's a pity he never tells us her name.

Sometimes we can think of Jesus' miracles, then and now, as acts of dazzling power. The problem with this idea is that if we see Jesus as going around "zapping" people it's hard to figure out why there were times when he could not perform any miracles at all, or that they happened in stages. Whatever else miracles are, they are deeply personal encounters of faith.

As Catholics we believe in the power of miracles and that the source of them is always the grace of God. But we do not have to see them as something done to us from without. Rather, we can see them as unlocking something from within. For some people Jesus' word or touch set free the healing power God had placed in them. For others it came through another person's intercession. The same holds true for us today.

Furthermore, being anointed, celebrating Reconciliation or Eucharist, going to a place of pilgrimage, fasting, being prayed over, or meditating can have a similar effect. Looked at in this way we can see why some people are healed and others are not. If a personal encounter with Jesus did not always lead to healing, then why should it surprise us that some other encounters these days do not always unlock God's healing within us.

Small and large-scale miracles are happening everyday. Today's Gospel reminds us that they do not happen for show or for the sake of the crowd. They are realizations of faith. Taking Peter's mother-in-law as our model we are healed and strengthened so that we can witness to God's saving power, serve the Kingdom of God in any way we can, and continue to wait on the Lord.

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