

Our readings today point to 3 things

Life is very difficult at times

This is relieved truly only in Christ

We are all called to preach this to the world

Our 1st reading comes from the Book of Job

Job is an Old Testament character

He was very wealthy

But he did not put his trust in possessions

He trusted in God

In the story, Satan comes to God

And God asks: 'Have you seen my servant Job?'

Satan says: yes, sure Job blesses you

Look at everything you have given him

Let me take the things away

I will show you what he is made of

So God gives Satan permission to do as he pleases

Just do not touch him

So in one day, job suffers a tremendous loss

All his children are killed

All his possessions are either killed or destroyed by a wind storm

And yet Job responds

The Lord gives

The Lord takes

Blessed be the name of the Lord

So Satan comes back into God's presence

Ok, those were just things

Let me have his health

Then you will really see what he is made of

So God again gives permission

His only instruction, 'You cannot take his life'

So Satan again attacks Job

This time with sores and pestilence on his body

He turns his wife and friends against him

Totally isolating him

Telling him that if he only admits what he has done

God will again bless him

But Job perseveres in his innocence

Eventually God drives Satan away from Job

He blesses him with more than he ever dreamed

But our reading today comes in the midst of his predicament

And Job is frustrated, almost defeated

He bemoans how harsh life is

It is like military service

Demanding, even to the point of putting our life at jeopardy

It is like that of a hireling

Having no say about the conditions of work

No better than slavery

Totally dependent on the slave master

Helpless in the face of circumstances beyond human control

Job has lost sight of any value to life

These afflictions have been thrust upon him

He cries out to God

Almost in despair

Job knew God in a special way

But not in the way we know Him

When we are in similar situations

When we face things in our lives

The loss of our health

Injuries or accidents

The loss of a job

Death of our loved ones

If we fall into the grasp of an addiction of any kind

So many things that are a part of what it is to be human

We face them with Jesus right by our side

Christ did not come into our world as a Band-Aid

He came as a salve, an ointment
He did not come to tell us about suffering or joy
He came to walk through them
First in his own passion, death and resurrection
Then to accompany us as we go through this pilgrimage with him
His passion continues as we join our sufferings to his
His resurrection continues as we celebrate with him
When Christ arrived at Simon Peter's house
His mother in law was ill
Without a word, Jesus raised her up
In Greek, the same verb *–egeiro–*
Is used here as in other resurrection accounts
Jesus raised her, and she served them
Jesus shows us he has power even over death
And what does he do after this?
He leaves them
First to pray, to rejuvenate himself
Then he goes off to other places
He wants them to follow him for the right reasons
Not as a miracle worker, doing his magic
He wants to be king of their hearts
So God's reign can begin to take root in them

And through them, into the whole world

Which brings us to our final point

We are all called to be his witnesses

We are all called to preach the Good News to the world

We do this with our words

More important, we do it with our actions

In his own eyes, St Paul was nothing special

He was not called because of his abilities to speak

To persuade others

Not because he was more righteous than anyone else

He was called because God chose him

So it wasn't if Paul preached

It was a matter of how he preached

Would it be grudgingly and reluctantly?

Or would it be willingly and with enthusiasm?

Paul realized this was his destiny

He embraces the call

This did not protect him from any harm coming his way

He was repeatedly whipped and left for dead

He was shipwrecked and imprisoned

In all this, he remained faithful

To better preach the Gospel

He would conform his life to the life of others

To the weak, he became weak

He became all things to all

For one reason

For the sake of the Gospel and for those to whom he was sent

Life is difficult

With and without faith

And sometimes we complain

Then our good old 'Catholic guilt' can slip in

We think complaining is sinning

We are told: 'Offer it up'

But it doesn't have to be this way

It is not that we complain

It is how we complain

But complaining doesn't mean we are sinning

It doesn't mean we are losing our faith

It can even be a sign of faith

Job complained

The psalms are filled with complaints

The Book of Lamentations is filled with God's people calling out

If we come to that point
Our complaints keep God in mind
We acknowledge that God has the power to alleviate our suffering
We do this confident that He hears us
And that he answers us
We ask for the grace to hear and accept his answer
We know there is only one question
It is not how or why
It is who
We know Christ loves us
He holds us in his arms
He knows what it is to suffer
And he will be there walking through it with us
He came to heal the brokenhearted
To free all those who come to him
And we are called to bring that message to our families and friends
To our workplaces and schools
We are called to preach with our lives
To bring Christ into a broken world
So he might reign in our hearts
And in the hearts of all his children
To live in this way is not easy

It can even bring its own sense of suffering

St Paul knew this

When he spoke the truth, he was often beaten

But that didn't stop him

And the risk of being rejected cannot stop us

Because like St Paul

We really have no choice

We preach Christ to the world

We preach him with love and understanding

But without watering down the truth

Without compromising the Gospel

We are called to be light to a darkened room

If a candle is lit

Or a light bulb is turned on

There is only one way for them to give light

That is to burn themselves up

We do the same

Giving of ourselves

Giving light to others

Building God's Kingdom here and hereafter