

**Homily for February 5, 2006
Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)**

By Father Charles Bowes

Job 7:1-4, 6-7

Psalm 147:1-6

1 Corinthians 9:16-19, 22-23

Mark 1:29-39

Suffering becomes redemptive when we invite the Lord to be in it with us.

Job seems so pessimistic: “Life is drudgery; I am assigned months of misery; I am filled with restlessness! Will this ever end?” And in the next breath he declares: “My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle; my life is like the wind! Where did the time go?”

Job is right to cry out against such a life. So are we, for if we merely accept it, we will do nothing to change it. If we do not acknowledge the demons that seem to hold sway in our lives, in our world, we will not invite God to cast them out. Although the readings for today begin with a cry of desperation, they end on a note of triumph. The suffering people in the Gospel came to Jesus and were healed and set free. If, like them, we seek Jesus out and open ourselves to the power of his compassion, the forces of evil in our lives and in our world can be driven out...and the reign of God will be established. This burdensome life really does hold promise.

Just how much hope and promise a life of faith holds is captured, I think, in the words of a little old Bosnian woman. A number of years back, a medical

relief mission traveled to Bosnia. It was at a time when many of the cities in the country had been torn apart due to fighting among the political and religious factions. The unrest caused many people to flee their homes and settle in refugee camps. One such camp included hundreds of refugees being housed in “homes” that were nothing more than the equivalent of a typical, small, outdoor shed. The camp was neatly arranged with row after row of the shed-homes. When the news spread that there was a group of visitors, one tiny elderly woman came forward with the biggest smile and aura of contentment. She was anxious to let the visitors know that the refugees did not lose everything. In her native tongue, she blurted out a statement that caused many of the other refugees to shake their heads in agreement. An interpreter shared her sentiments with the visitors: “She said, ‘They took everything we had. But they couldn’t take our faith in God.’”

These were profound words from a modern day Job. She probably lost all of her life’s possessions, and perhaps maybe even lost some family members and friends. This elderly Bosnian woman seemed to have every reason to question the goodness and love of God, and yet she found every reason to hold on to her faith. These simple words of a poor refugee woman might

help us keep things in perspective. Her example of faith can only lead us to consider how we might respond if we found ourselves in similar circumstances.

It is to the credit of our Girl and Boy Scouts that they are part of an organization that seeks to help, aid and assist people...and thereby imbue its members with a spirit that will stand them in good stead all the days of their lives. Scouts today come across as modern-day Jobs and examples of the Bosnian refugee woman.

Most recently, during the Christmas season, Scouts in the United States undertook a project to help others make the holidays less stressful. They took December as National Stress-Free Family Holiday Month and entitled their project Merry Christmassissippi, a cross-country holiday toy drive spanning more than 4,000 miles across the United States. Scouts and Scout leaders from California to Mississippi joined together with a goal to collect more than \$25,000 in gifts and supplies to be delivered to more than 300 children and families that were affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Last year's Good Turn 2004: Happy Holidays to Hurricane Homes raised approximately \$23,000 and served hundreds affected by the devastating hurricane season.

While this is an example of Scout work on a national level, locally, in our own parish, the backbone of our annual parish improvement day is provided by our scouts - sprucing up, touching up, fixing up, making our places of worship and service all the more serviceable and enduring. It is a privilege that our parish is associated so long and so well with such fine, character-building organizations and their leaders. Thank you for all you do, and may you continue to prosper.

The faith of Job and the faith of this Bosnian woman provide inspiring examples of faith in the midst of crises. These poor people had all the reasons in the world to walk away from God, and by all indication they were tempted to do so. But despair became an opportunity for hope. Doubt became the opportunity for faith. Crosses in life became the very source of strength in seeking the will of God. Such faith comes as a gift when we can join our crosses to the cross of Christ. Pain and suffering can be put into perspective when it is considered through the eyes of faith.

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