

FIFTH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR (B) – 7 FEBRUARY 2021
Mass in Thanksgiving for the Pastoral Care Project

Jesus went to her, took her by the hand and helped her up.

As the days of lockdown continue, for many people, though not for everyone, the frenetic pace of life has changed because of the current restrictions. Though we're not necessarily less busy, our days have taken on a different kind of routine from what we experienced in pre-pandemic days. Where we work has also changed! With people being encouraged to work from home where they can, home life and workplace now share the same environment. I'm sure is a bonus for some but a challenge for others.

It is very much within a home setting that the events in today's gospel take place and they describe a very busy day in the life of Jesus. Having first been to the synagogue, Jesus is called to the house of Peter's mother-in-law, who has fallen ill. He restores her to health and to the home where she lives and works. It is around the door to that home that a crowd later gathers and where they bring to Jesus the sick and those possessed by devils. Our Lord responds to their needs - he heals the sick and casts out the devils.

The following morning, long before dawn has broken, Jesus leaves the house to find a quiet place where he can pray - only to be found by the disciples, who tell him that everybody wants him. In response, Jesus takes up the work of a new day, but inviting the disciples to travel with him to the neighbouring towns.

At every turn in this busy passage of St Mark's Gospel, with hardly a moment to draw his breath, Jesus responds to each situation that is put before him with compassion and selfless giving. When he learns about the illness of Peter's mother-in-law, he goes 'straightaway' to see her and helps her up, restoring her health.

When the crowds gather later in the evening he shows great kindness by healing the sick and casting out devils. Even when he finds a place to be alone, he does not complain when his time is cut short by the disciples and the people who need his presence. Jesus seizes the moment as an opportunity to visit other places so that he can preach God's word there as well. He reminds the disciples that this is the reason that he has come into the world.

The Lord's mission is tireless and at its heart is the desire to show his Father's love for the world. Through our baptism we are also part of this mission. In today's second reading, St Paul shares with the Church in Corinth his own longing to proclaim the Gospel, a task that had been assigned to him by the Lord. Dedicating his life to God means making himself all things to all men.

In the same spirit of service and discipleship we give thanks today for the work of the Pastoral Care Project, with its particular focus on dementia and supporting the bereaved – and its mission statement: *raising awareness of the spiritual needs of the frail elderly – enabling carers to support them in their journey to the fullness of life.* The Project's trustees have guided this work for more than twenty-five years and they have enabled it to find a new home where it can continue to offer comfort and support to those in need.

The Project's lead-bishop, Bishop David McGough, highlighted its current priorities when he said: *Poverty has many faces, one of which is dementia in all its forms. Here that most precious possession, a sense of self and belonging, begins to crumble. To the onlooker it can sometimes seem that the sufferer is dispossessed of everything that makes us truly human. It is a poverty that cannot be contained. Husbands and wives, parents and children, must suffer the loss of so much that gave meaning to their mutual sharing.*

In his recent encyclical letter *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis reminds us that *in the depths of every heart, love creates bonds and expands existence, for it draws people out of themselves and towards others.* As we reflect on today's Gospel, it is not just the words that Jesus speaks or the miracles that he performs that draw people to him - it is his generous love for the people his Father has sent him to serve.

The love that Jesus shares restores both dignity and life to those who come close to him. It is this same love and compassion that enables us to overcome the things in our lives that divide or marginalise others. It awakens in us the presence of God, with the desire to go out and to serve.