

Year B Fifth Sunday Ordinary Time
Feb. 8, 2009
Jb 7:1-4, 6-7; Ps 147; 1 Cor 9:16-19, 22-23; Mk 1:29-39

The Book of Job is the Bible's most eloquent and forceful expression of the dreariness of human suffering. With an expression which became dear to St. Augustine, Job likens life on earth to military service (or boot camp, translated "drudgery" in our first reading). In this passage, depressed Job can envision no afterlife; he is in the depths of a "dark night of the soul," like two Thereses who would come after him (those of Lisieux and Calcutta). (At other times, Job will seem more confident that he will be vindicated, even in the afterlife.)

Life indeed is hard. There is a long period of suffering and at times desperation, the groaning of all creation that St. Paul speaks about in Rom 8:22, before we see the "refreshment" that the Lord gives (this is the word used in Acts 3:20). It is this consolation (remember that the Holy Spirit is the "Paraclete," or Consoler) that the psalm sings about. In the full version of the psalm, we are invited to count the stars, to count our blessings, to take account of all that we receive from the Lord, in order to not just go on, but to easily overcome (see Phil 4:12-13; Rom 8:37). It is the Lord's love which sustains us and gives us rest; his yoke is easy and his burden light, Mt 11:28-29. By the way, the last words of the psalm, "He [God] did not do thus to any (other) nation," in Latin, is applied to the unique gift of the Virgin of Guadalupe's appearance in Mexico: *non fecit taliter omni nationi*.

In the second part of the prophet Isaiah, called the "Book of the Consolation of Israel," the Good News is proclaimed that Israel's "boot camp" has ended: her sins have been paid for twice over, Is 40:1-11. It is this Good News which Jesus brought: exile from God is over, the time of blessing has begun with this new way of intimacy with the Lord that Jesus inaugurated (Mk 1:15; Heb 10:19-20). With an account having every mark of historicity, our evangelist, who was Simon Peter's assistant, tells us of the day that Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law from a fever. Jesus grabbed her by the hand and raised her, as he would do with the Jairus' little daughter, Mk 5:41, whom he calls "little lamb (*talitha*), like the lambs the Good Shepherd gathers in Is 40:11. And the Good Shepherd does give rest and restores the soul, Ps 23. Like Jesus, let us pray for this.