

HOMILY 5TH Sunday Ordinary Time
February 7, 2021

My good friend Sr. Mary Finn passed away recently. I know some of you remember her as I have brought her here to speak. She was the closest person to sainthood I have ever known in this life and she was very important to me, particularly during my years in the seminary. I was thinking this week about the first time I met her. I had heard her speak and was very impressed, but this was my first meeting with her. She assigned the ministries that we would be doing during our seminary years. I had reviewed all of the possibilities, prayed about it, and I decided I was going to do hospital ministry. When I met with her, I had a whole speech prepared about my decision to do hospital ministry and I gave her my whole speech. When I was finished she said: “Oh dear, Oh Jim, they are going to love you at Crossroads.” Crossroads was a place where I would be counseling poor people, most of them homeless or near homeless. I thought: “I don’t think she heard me,” so I gave my speech again. When I was done, she said: “Oh dear, Oh Jim, you are going to love Crossroads.” Now I am thinking: “This crazy old lady is not listening to me.” Then we started to have a discussion and by the end of the discussion I said: “I think I am going to love Crossroads.” I am really glad that I let go of that hospital ministry. I think God was speaking to me through Sr. Mary Finn. My time at Crossroads was life changing. I saw poor people in a totally different light. I worked full time several summers there during my seminary years and loved it. I was on the Board of Directors for 7 years.

Life rarely goes as we plan. Our lives are filled with disappointments and difficulties. My disappointment over not doing hospital ministry was a minor disappointment, but many of them are big, a difficult medical diagnosis, the death of someone we love, the loss of a job, the end of a

marriage. Sometimes when these things happen, we say what Job said in the first reading today: “I shall not see happiness again.” And I think that is normal. We need to recognize our feelings, allow them, and sit with them a little while. Then we need to decide what we are going to do with them. If it is something that we cannot change, we need to trust in God to lead us to a better place. Job made that statement that he will never see happiness again, but he never gave up on God, and God saw him through to a place where he did see happiness again.

In the Gospel reading we saw Jesus at work in the world. Jesus cured Simon’s mother-in-law. That evening the whole town gathered at the door. Everyone wanted to get in on the miracles. It is easy to follow Jesus when we are getting what we want. Jesus got up early the next morning and went off by himself to pray. This is how Jesus kept his ministry in line with what his Father wanted. Everyone was looking for him so they could get in on the miracles. Jesus told them: “I came into the world to preach.” And that was exactly right. The people who were cured that day were happy that day, but they were all going to get sick again and die. Jesus had the words of eternal life and that is important.

When we have life’s disappointments and suffering, we need to be persistent in prayer. Jesus performed miracles in the Gospel reading and he continues to perform them today. I have seen them. So continue to pray for what you are hoping for, but if it seems like that is not going to happen, we need to be open to moving on to something else. Sometimes prayer changes us. Sometimes we think if we pray enough Rosaries or if we get enough people praying for what we want, we will change God. Prayer does not change God, but prayer can transform us. God understands what we are asking for and what we are feeling, but God sees our lives in a totally different way that we cannot understand. Much of what happens in prayer is a mystery of faith.

This is true of big things and little things. I am glad that I let go of hospital ministry when I did because that was exactly what was right for me. If I had persisted with Sr. Mary Finn that day, I am sure she would have ended up saying: “Oh dear, Oh Jim, if that is what you want.” But I would have missed a life changing experience. Remember Job’s example. You may feel as though you shall never see happiness again, but do not give up on God. He will see you through.