

FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME [B]

Job 7:1-4, 6-7; Psalm 147; 1 Corinthians 9:16-19, 22-23; Mark 1:29-39

Jesus' mission was to reclaim the lost sheep of Israel.

All of Jesus' teachings, his entire authority, his repeated exorcisms, his many healings and all of his miracles – *everything* Jesus says and does - happen to advance his *mission*, his *purpose*.

Given the spiritual and political structure of the country, Jesus' mission simply was impossible to carry out. And yet – and *yet* - Jesus devotes every ounce of effort and energy he has to make his mission happen.

We especially see Jesus' spirited resolve on display in today's Gospel. No sooner does Jesus heal the mother-in-law of Peter, than the *whole* town gathers at the door.

And what is Jesus' response?

He shows them *kindness*.

The next morning, Jesus rises early before dawn so that he finally can pray in solitude. And how did this go for Jesus? Well, perhaps first coaxed by his colleagues to do so, Peter tracks Jesus down and blurts out, "[hey] everyone is looking for you" (Mark 1:37).

It is the same message as the night before.

Once again, in the face of impossible odds, Jesus shows *kindness*. Jesus does not excuse himself by insisting he wants to pray, but rather he moves on to the neighboring villages, so that they, too, can repent and believe in the Good News.

For Jesus, awareness of the mission is what makes it simple: "For this *purpose* have I come" (Mark 1:38)

Are you aware of your *mission*? What is *your* purpose?

In the **first reading**, the Job is able to endure terrible suffering precisely because he knows and lives forth from his *mission* always to seek God.

In the **second reading**, Saint Paul, following the Lord's example as closely as possible, discovers and accepts God's *purpose*; namely to be everyone's servant. No one is left out: "I have become all things to all, to save at least some" (1 Corinthians 9:22).

So, then, what is *your* purpose?

For 236 years America has dared to honor *freedom of conscience* and *religious liberty*.

This mission – *our* mission – suddenly is in jeopardy.

On January 20, as some right here in Sandusky even where just underway to Washington in pilgrimage to protest the 39th anniversary of the controversial Supreme Court decision to legalize abortion, the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) announced that religious institutions who serve the common good – including Catholic hospitals, charities and universities – will be forced to provide its employees with health insurance benefits that will include contraceptives, abortion-inducing drugs and sterilization coverage.

Essentially the mandate of the federal government says this to Catholics (and Orthodox Christians and some Protestant Christians): *either you will be in contempt of the law or you will be contempt of your religious belief*.

The mandate will force an impressive array of noble Catholic institutions either to deny a fundamental tenant of our Catholic Faith – that is, to cast it right aside - or face staggering civil penalties. Or we will be forced to close our hospitals, universities and charities that so courageously, compassionately and generously serve all citizens.

Rest assured, the stakes are very, very high:

- One in six patients in the United States is cared for in a Catholic hospital.
- Catholic Charities employees over 70,000 people nationwide and is the single largest private provider of assistance to needy and deserving people in our country – second only to the government.
- There are over 200 Catholic universities and colleges, 4 Catholic medical schools and 28 Catholic law schools educating over 1,000,000 students annually.

Catholic institutions have been given one year to be in compliance. This would be laughable if it were not so deadly serious.

Friends, the HHS edict is not about preventing women or men from buying anything themselves. This is an act of the federal government telling the Catholic Church (and other religious institutions serving the common good) what it must buy.

And what the federal government seeks to have us purchase are products we hold to be immoral.

If we dare to be true to our *mission* as followers of Jesus and members of His Church, then we must do all we can to protect, defend and champion human life in all its forms and stages, rejecting all incursions to discriminate human life because of size, utility or place of residence.

If we dare to be true to our mission as citizens of the United States, we must stand firm upon our nation's core beliefs in *freedom of conscience* and *religious liberty*.

Let us call upon the first citizen of the United States to be canonized a saint and the first native born United States citizen to be canonized a saint.
[the response is "pray for us"]

- Saint Francis Xavier Cabrini, pray for us!
- Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton, pray for us!