

A giver of hope

Patricia Datchuck Sánchez | Feb. 4, 2012

Are you an optimist or a pessimist? Do you see the glass half-empty or half-full? In today's sacred texts, we will meet both kinds of people. Job, who is featured in the first reading, is bemoaning the very fact of his existence. He is a representative figure from whom many lessons may be learned, but at this point in his story, Job epitomizes the person whose contentment and well-being are intrinsically bound to his success as a patriarch of a large family, to his health and material wealth, and to his good name.

All these were regarded as blessings from God, who was pleased with Job. His glass was not just half-full; it was full to the brim. But then the bottom fell out of Job's world, and his optimism, hope and joy seemed to evaporate.

In today's Marcan Gospel, we'll meet Peter's mother-in-law, who was sick with a fever. Her glass probably seemed half-empty because sickness was traditionally associated with sin. At the very least, her illness rendered her unclean and unable to participate with her family, friends and neighbors in public worship. One difference between Job and Peter's mother-in-law was that she had people who cared enough about her to get her the help she needed. They told Jesus about her. Job, on the other hand, had "friends" who exacerbated his situation by trying to find someone to blame for his troubles.

With these readings, we are invited to consider our own response to the inherent difficulties of life and to examine how we help others cope with their struggles. Are we pessimists with a complaint for every evil in the world, or are we what William J. Bausch has called "hope-givers"? By way of illustration, Bausch relates a story told to him by an acquaintance:



As he sat on a newly covered antique window seat that his wife Helen had

treasured through many years, the man was burdened with a sense of hopelessness. Problems at work weighed heavily on him, and because of his advanced years, the man feared he would not be able to find another job. He started to light his pipe and accidentally spilled some hot ash, which burned a hole right in the center of the window seat cover. How would Helen react to a hole in her treasured antique? As Bausch tells it, Helen calmly threaded a needle and stitched a beautiful flower over the charred spot. When her husband looked at the finished work, he realized that in that moment, he could see a summary of their long life together. His heart began to soar. He had married a repairer of broken spirits, a healer of wounds, a woman whose very presence was an antidote to pessimism. He understood, perhaps for the very first time, that it was Helen's deep and abiding trust in God that made it possible for her to be a source of light and a giver of hope in times that might plunge others

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time
 Job 7:1-4, 6-7
 Psalm 147
 I Corinthians 9:16-19, 22-25
 Mark 1:28-39

[Full text of the readings \[1\]](#)

into darkness and despair? (from *A World of Stories for Preachers and Teachers*, Twenty-Third Publications, 1998).

Job's trust in God eventually enabled him to find the hope and courage to endure all his sufferings. Paul (second reading) found such hope in God and in the Gospel that he could not help but preach. When he did, he made every effort to adapt himself to the needs and circumstances of his listeners so that they too could find their hope in the good news of salvation. During his ministry, Jesus acted as a giver of hope to those he taught, healed and forgave, and in the end, he died so that human hope might never be extinguished.

Like Helen's husband, we all burn holes in precious things. We make holes in our relationships through selfishness and thoughtlessness. We burn holes in the hearts of one another with angry words, gossip and lies. Whether we dash another's enthusiasm or ridicule their dreams or quash their hope, we burn holes. Holes grow deeper and wider when we do not forgive or ask forgiveness.

Although these holes are inevitable, we are free to choose the attitude with which we will deal with them. Will we dwell on the hole and become lost in negativity, or will we heal that hole like Helen, whose trust in God made of her a giver of hope to others?

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[1] <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/020512.cfm>