**5th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME [8th February, 2015]**

READINGS: Job 7:1-4, 6-7/ 1 Cor. 9:16-19, 22-23 / Mark 1:29-39

THEME: THE PRIORITY OF PREACHING THE GOSPEL

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**Healings and other miracles are but walking aids (sticks) on the path to God’s kingdom, whereas faith in eternal life is the light shining on the path to heaven**. Paradoxically, however, today in Africa and elsewhere, Christian ministry and church services in many “churches” seem to emphasize healing and miracles over the preaching of the gospel of eternal salvation. It seems that too many Christians are seeking the walking aids, instead of the light of faith, which both the spiritually abled and disabled, need to see their way to heaven.

That many Christians are seeking first healings and miracles is evident even on the TV screens and the airwaves. The readings of this Sunday, however, remind us that despite the challenges (e.g. sickness, poverty) of earthly life (*cf*. Job’s story), the preaching of the gospel of eternal salvation has priority over healing and miracles.

Yes, according to the gospel reading, Jesus healed many sick people and cast out several demons; but when he was told the following day that many more were looking for him to be healed, he responded: “Let us go somewhere else — to the nearby villages — **so I can preach there also. That is why I have come**” (Mark 1:38 NIV). Beloved, if physical healing were a requirement for heaven, the Lord would not have said: “if your right hand causes you to sin cut it off and throw it away. It is better to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell” (Matt. 5:20).

St. Paul, in turn, emphasizes the paramount importance of proclaiming the gospel of salvation: “when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. **Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel**! …I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. … I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings” (1 Cor. 9:16, 19, 23 NIV). Furthermore, St. Paul stresses the preeminence of the preaching of the gospel by placing it over even the ministry of baptizing: “For **Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel** — not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor. 1:17-18 NIV).

Why does the Lord give the preaching of the gospel priority over healing and miracles? It is because no one can be saved without faith in God (*cf*. Heb. 11; Rom. 10:8-13). And this faith comes through the hearing of the word; and how can people hear the message if they are not preached to? (Rom. 10:14).

Beloved, if the path to heaven is narrow and winding, what will be the use of the walking sticks (of healing and miracles) if we cannot see our way. Let us therefore seek first the light of faith which comes from the preaching of the gospel. In that case, even if we have no walking stick, we can crawl along the path to heaven. Amen!