

Daily Office Devotional, Wednesday, January 13, 2021
The week of the first Sunday after Epiphany

Today we celebrate the Feast of Hilary of Poitiers. (See below.)

Daily Office Lectionary Readings

AM Psalm 119:1-24; PM Psalm 12, 13, 14
Isa. 41:1-16; Eph. 2:1-10; Mark 1:29-45

Morning Prayer, Rite 2, page 75, Book of Common Prayer
Evening Prayer, Rite 2, page 115, Book of Common Prayer
Compline (Night Prayer), Page 127, Book of Common Prayer

Daily Office Gospel, Mark 1:26-46

29 As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. 30 Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. 31 He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

32 That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. 33 And the whole city was gathered around the door. 34 And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him. 35 In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. 36 And Simon and his companions hunted for him. 37 When they found him, they said to him, 'Everyone is searching for you.' 38 He answered, 'Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do.' 39 And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

40 A leper came to him begging him, and kneeling he said to him, 'If you choose, you can make me clean.' 41 Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, 'I do choose. Be made clean!' 42 Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean. 43 After sternly warning him he sent him away at once, 44 saying to him, 'See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.' 45 But he went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the word, so that Jesus could no

longer go into a town openly, but stayed out in the country; and people came to him from every quarter.

David's Reflections

The Gospel readings this week feel like a rapid sequence of flash videos of Jesus' healings. Mark's Gospel uses the adverb "immediately" over 50 times, fast-flashing images of Jesus on the move, healing, casting out demons, receiving the outcast and wounded. This passage goes by like a blur—Peter's mother-in-law delivered of a fever, the sick and demon-oppressed being healed and delivered, Jesus on a prayer retreat, and Jesus healing a leper.

I get the feeling of oppression-overload. How many people do I know who have not been delivered or delivered with the dramatic suddenness of these episodes? Does Jesus still heal? Do such deliverances still take place? If so, why not always and for every person?

Mark gives a stark example of Jesus' inability to heal (Mark 6) that feels like a shocker. He actually says, "Jesus was not able to do many mighty works there." Jesus was not able to do many healings in his hometown because of the oppressive atmosphere of unbelief and skepticism he experienced there. Is that it? Is it our fault that healings and deliverances don't come?

It's not that simple. In the New Testament Jesus sometimes healed when there was no faith to provoke it (John 5:1-11). Rather, it seems our concept of deliverance looks out through too narrow a lens. We tend to see no deliverance if suffering continues. However, God was present in Jesus' life during his crucifixion (2 Corinthians 5 says that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself). Yet, there was no deliverance FROM suffering. Could it be that deliverance sometimes comes not from but rather WITHIN suffering?

I want my faith in Christ to be such that he is set free to work his deliverances without my prescribing how they are to come about. Can I pray with bold expectancy, knowing that healing and deliverance will come, while at the same time avoiding looking only for a certain kind of deliverance? That seems especially crucial in the face of COVID 19, an unrelenting pandemic. How do I look for God's presence and activity now? How do we experience deliverance when so many are dying? What is God up to in this moment that might escape my gaze, blurred by cynicism and despair?

Lewis Smedes in his book *Caring and Commitment*, says:
"It is an unavoidable biblical truth that God calls Christians to suffer with Christ. . . . Miracles are not the answer to any individual's suffering. At best, they eliminate a person's sickness and disabilities, but this does not eliminate his or her suffering
. . . . There are minor deaths waiting ahead on every person's road to major death. Nor is one person's miracle an answer to other people's suffering. Indeed, when an individual celebrates a healing of his or her wounds, it may be to others only a painful reminder of their larger unhealed wounds. . . .
"Healing within suffering is as wonderful as healing from suffering. The amazing amount of health in this broken world is a greater sign and wonder than an occasional healing from sickness. . . .
"We . . . need a 'paradigm shift' in reference to God's will for our health and happiness. Modern Americans have accepted a paradigm for life that includes their entitlement to health and fulfillment. Their paradigm of the good life is not sacrifice but rights; not the possibility of victory through suffering but the guarantee of escape from suffering."

Collect of the Day, First Sunday after the Epiphany: The Baptism of our Lord
Father in heaven, who at the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan proclaimed him your beloved Son and anointed him with the Holy Spirit: Grant that all who are baptized into his Name may keep the covenant they have made, and boldly confess him as Lord and Savior; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting. *Amen.* (BCP, 214)

Today we celebrate the Feast of Hilary of Poitiers, bishop and doctor of the church (died 368 CE). <http://www.satucket.com/lectionary/Hilary.htm>

Collect of the Feast of Hilary of Poitiers
Keep us steadfast, Lord God, in that true faith that we professed at our baptism; that, like your servant Hilary of Poitiers, we may rejoice in having you for our Father, and may abide in your Son, in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit; for you live and reign for ever and ever as one God in Trinity of Persons. *Amen.*

A Collect for Grace

Lord God, almighty and everlasting Father, you have brought us in safety to this new day: Preserve us with your mighty power, that we may not fall into

sin, nor be overcome by adversity; and in all we do, direct us to the fulfilling of your purpose; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.* (BCP, 100)

For stewardship of creation

O merciful Creator, your hand is open wide to satisfy the needs of every living creature: Make us always thankful for your loving providence; and grant that we, remembering the account that we must one day give, may be faithful stewards of your good gifts; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.* (BCP, 259)

In the Order of Worship for Evening

Blessed are you, O Lord, the God of our fathers, creator of the changes of day and night, giving rest to the weary, renewing the strength of those who are spent, bestowing upon us occasions of song in the evening. As you have protected us in the day that is past, so be with us in the coming night; keep us from every sin, every evil, and every fear; for you are our light and salvation, and the strength of our life. To you be glory for endless ages. *Amen.* (BCP, 113)

A Collect for Mission

Lord Jesus Christ, you stretched out your arms of love on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of your saving embrace: So clothe us in your Spirit that we, reaching forth our hands in love, may bring those who do not know you to the knowledge and love of you; for the honor of your Name. *Amen.* (BCP, 101)