

ADVENT WEEK THREE

December 18, 2019

Candle of Joy

Matthew 8:14-17

When Jesus entered Peter's house, he saw his mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever; he touched her hand... Matthew 8:14-15a

The Gospel of Matthew does not linger at this scene of Jesus healing Simon Peter's mother-in-law. Nor are we given many details. We do not know what her name was or how long she had been bed-ridden. We do not know what they might have said or how well they knew each other. That does not mean however that we should read over this story quickly or spend little time with it in prayer.

What comes into my mind and memory when I pray this passage are those times when an afflicted loved one is lying in the sick bed and one of the servants of Jesus, a pastor, pays a visit. In the course of the conversation, the pastor places a hand on the arm of the loved one and quietly asks, "May I pray with you?"

In the stillness that follows, people arrange themselves around the bed, and the pastor gently takes their hand. The prayer places the afflicted one—and the community of care surrounding the afflicted—into the center of God's Light and Love. The prayer closes "in Jesus name."

It is a moment no less sacred than this encounter between Jesus and Simon Peter's mother-in-law. This is the only healing story in Matthew's Gospel where Jesus takes the initiative. No one has to bring a human need to his attention, he moves immediately to serve, to heal, and restore. How do we respond to this One who moves in the direction of our suffering without our even having to ask? We light the candle of "Joy!"

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