

## FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (YEAR B)

February 7, 2021

Job 7:1–4, 6–7 • 1 Corinthians 9:16–19, 22–23 • Mark 1:29–39

### I.

Everyone knows that Neil Armstrong was the first man to walk on the moon.

But most people probably don't know who was the last man to walk on the moon.

It was Eugene Cernan,  
commander of the *Apollo 17* mission in 1972.

Before his death in 2017,  
Cernan recounted his experiences in an interesting 2014 documentary titled  
“The Last Man on the Moon.”

Like his colleague and friend, Neil Armstrong,  
Eugene Cernan understood that, on this final lunar expedition,  
he was representing all of humanity.

As he said it in the documentary about that mission,  
“Everyone... was going to the moon with us.”

And before leaving the moon,  
Cernan did something interesting:

He traced the initials of his daughter, Tracy, on the lunar surface.

Cernan said,

“I don't know what possessed me to do it. ...  
And someday, some time, I can only believe...  
that someone who will go back [to the moon],  
and that's what they'll find.”

Eugene Cernan's words and his gesture were both personal and universal:  
one, particular man representing all of humanity.

## II.

Similarly, in today's Gospel,  
we find Jesus reaching large numbers of people in a limited way.

First, in this regard, a theological point.

Before Christ ascended into heaven,  
he was bound by locomotion, just like the rest of us:  
he could only be in one place at one time.

That limit—sometimes a very frustrating limit—  
is part and parcel of the human experience,  
which the Son of God assumed as part of the Incarnation.

Today's Gospel emphasizes the extent of the crowds around Jesus and their needs:

“When it was evening, after sunset,  
they brought to him all who were ill or possessed by demons.  
The whole town was gathered at the door.”

Likewise, the apostles inform him,  
“Everyone is looking for you,”  
to which Jesus responds:  
“Let us go on the nearby villages that I may preach there also.  
For this purpose I have come.”

Mark the Evangelist concludes the episode with a general statement:

“So he went into their synagogues,  
preaching and driving out demons throughout the whole of Galilee.”

The reading gives us a sense of what Jesus did during his public ministry:  
preaching, healing, and exorcising demons.

Each was a component of the proclamation of the Gospel,  
and the making present of the kingdom or action of God in the world.

What's interesting, and significant,  
is how limited by time and space Jesus is during his public ministry.

Even the Son of God can only do so much in 24 hours!

So, Jesus' ministry is necessarily limited,  
and it develops organically.

The public ministry is the preparation for the paschal mystery:  
the passion, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus,  
along with the sending of the Holy Spirit.

That action will be transcendent,  
surpassing earthly and human limits,  
but that takes place only after the public ministry.

In today's Gospel, Jesus starts by healing one person,  
Simon Peter's mother-in-law,  
and then moves on to the rest of the sick.

And, we get the sense that, being fully human,  
Jesus is exhausted by the end of the day.

So, he rises early to spend time in prayer and solitude—  
and there's he's interrupted because the needs of the people are never-ending.

All of us have had similar experiences!

As part of Jesus' limited and organically developing ministry,  
he makes Peter's house in Capernaum his headquarters.

“On leaving the synagogue  
Jesus entered the house of Simon and Andrew with James and John.”

As part of the Incarnation,  
Christ enters into the reality around him,  
making do with what is available.

I think that God is looking for us to do the same:  
to do the best we can—all that we can—with what we have.

The pandemic has imposed new limits on all of us,  
but that's no reason to stop doing God's work.

Here at the Cathedral, as in other parishes,  
 the mission of the Church continues:  
 the faith is taught to people of all ages in different formats,  
 the sacraments are administered,  
 and the poor are served.

The fact that Jesus' headquarters during his public ministry is a house  
 also tells us something important:  
 faith is taught and lived out in the home;  
 the family is the domestic Church;  
 and the family dinner can be, at its best, the domestic Eucharist.

So, an encouragement to couples and families:  
 pray together;  
 pass along and live out the faith as best you can.

You are directly imitating Jesus and the apostles.

### **III.**

Each of the six manned lunar missions left behind plaques  
 on the base of the lunar landing vehicle that remained on the moon.

The plaques for the first and last missions included inscriptions  
 that expressed the profound significance of their accomplishments.

The plaque for *Apollo 17* reads as follows:

HERE MAN COMPLETED HIS FIRST EXPLORATIONS OF THE MOON  
 DECEMBER 1972, A.D.  
 MAY THE SPIRIT OF PEACE IN WHICH WE CAME  
 BE REFLECTED IN THE LIVES OF ALL MANKIND

One person can only do so much,  
 but that can be a lot.

It was true of the Son of God during his public ministry.

It can be true of us, each day of our lives.