

[Today/yesterday] our community paid tribute to Chief Warrant Officer 2 Matthew Kelley, a young man who served our country in the army and lost his life while on duty in Iraq. People remember Matthew as a man who believed in God and loved his country enough to put his life at risk. He had the same influences the rest of us did – parents who loved America and role models who gave him a desire to serve. But he took his willingness to serve to the ends of the earth and the end of his life. For some people, a single person or a single event inspires them to a life of service; for others, no matter how much positive influence they get, they care more about their own comfort than serving the needs of others.

Matthew gave an extraordinary example of service. In today's gospel we see an ordinary example. It takes place at the end of Jesus' first day of public ministry. He has already preached powerfully in a synagogue and freed a possessed man from a demon. Simon's mother-in-law is sick with a fever, so he brings Jesus home. Jesus sizes up the problem, takes the woman's hand and helps her up. The fever leaves her, and in response, she begins to wait on them. Immediately, she serves – probably fixing dinner. It's a brief story, but it has two interesting details. First, when Saint Mark writes how Jesus helped the woman up, he uses a verb that recurs at the end of the gospel, when he tells how God raised Jesus up from the dead. On the first day of Jesus' ministry we see a foreshadowing of what he will do for all his faithful followers – raise them up. Second, when the woman waits on them, Mark uses the same word that gives us the word for deacon; it is the most-used word in the New Testament to describe what Christian service is all about. It involves common, everyday duties, but done in charity as a response to faith. Clearly, this woman was moved by the presence, the power and the message of Jesus, and she too became a disciple after a very brief encounter.

A lot of the service we give is a direct result of something wonderful that happens to us. A child is born to you, and your heart immediately fills with love, gratitude, and a desire to take care of this infant. Or you come through surgery successfully, and you sense not just a healed body, but a body that has a mission, a body that wants to thank God in some very specific ways. You hear the story of a man who lost his life in service to our country, and it makes you want to become a better citizen.

Like Peter's mother-in-law, we all have moments when we suddenly feel called to serve. But we do not always follow through. Sometimes after making a resolution to do something positive for others, we slip, we forget, or we fall back into the same patterns we had before. Think back over the past year or so of the particular blessings you have received, whether they pertain to your health, school, work, country or family. Did you promise God something in gratitude for what happened? If so, how have you done? What more might you do? Simon's mother-in-law gives us an example of responding to the call to serve every day because of the wonders that God has worked in our life.