

Reaching for the Presence of God

By: Fr. Joseph Pellegrino

Our dear departed pastor, the finest priest I ever met, Fr. John LaTondress, used to say to me, "Joe, people have such huge problems. We, priests, think we have problems. We don't have problems, our people have the real problems." There are so many aspects to life for which there are no solutions. People have lost a loved one. Who has a solution to make the pain go away? This last week we buried a young man. Some members of our parish have chronically ill children. In some families, alcohol, drugs, psychological problems, or infidelity have broken up a marriage and a home. How can the family return to its state before it was devastated? It cannot. There is no solution. Chronic sickness and pain become the focus of a person's mind. How can he or she make believe it is not there? They can not.

Through all this you folk come to Church to pray to the Lord. I am constantly edified by those of you who have learned to control the anger which your problems have occasioned and come to the Lord for help. And so you come, even though it is so difficult. I know that sometimes you hear us priests speak in flowery language about the wonders and beauty of God. You hear constant encouragement to lead Christian lives, to be people of faith, but, for some of you, all you can focus on is the turmoil, the trauma in your lives. Perhaps you hear priests say that like Jesus you need to go to a quiet place to pray, but you cannot escape the reality which is your own situation in life. Nor can you escape the turmoil within yourselves.

To you folk, and to us all, God has given the Book of Job. The Book of Job is framed around a story of trauma and reward. Job was a prosperous man with the perfect family. Then everything went wrong. One day he received the following messages: now it happened on the day when his sons and his daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, that a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them, and the Sabeans attacked and took them. They also slew the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you." While he was still speaking, another also came and said, "The first of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them, and I alone have escaped to tell you." While he was still speaking, another also came and said, "The Chaldeans formed three bands and made a raid on the camels and took them and slew the servants with the edge of the sword; and I alone have escaped to tell you." While he was still speaking, another also came and said, "Your sons and your daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, and behold, a great wind came from across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people and they died; and I alone have escaped to tell you." Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped. And he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked I shall return there. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD."

And if all this was not enough, even too much, then Job was plagued with sores all through his body. Through most of the book of Job he sits in ashes suffering all these pains, and considering suffering. At the end of the Book of Job, God rewards his for continuing his faith in him.

However, it is the forty chapter between the terrors that attack Job and the happy ending that are really important to us today. Job and his so called friends ask the same questions we all ask when besieged with problems. This is particularly evident in today's first reading. "I have

been assigned months of misery... My days come to an end without hope... I shall not see happiness again." Job's own wife tells him to curse God and die. He cannot explain why these terrible things have happened to him. But through it all, the turmoil, the doubting, the pain, the loss, Job keeps faith in God. He knows that God is there, somewhere. His faith is rewarded by recognizing the presence of God in the midst of the pain.

Job is an ancient biblical type of Jesus, confronted with the pain and suffering of mankind in today's gospel and with his own personal impending suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the cross of Calvary. Jesus' total sacrifice of himself for his people and for God's Kingdom results in his feeling completely abandoned. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me," he prays on the cross beginning Psalm 22. But Jesus keeps faith in God, his Father. God vindicates Jesus and Job. That's the theological term we use. It means God's actions show the truth of Job's and Jesus' faith in the face of their turmoil.

Nothing could take God's life away from Job or Jesus. Not even death could destroy this life. Job believed in this. Jesus gave this to us. Perhaps, St. Paul put it best in the Letter to the Romans:

"No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

In the face of turmoil, through trauma, in pain for which there is no cure, even when we feel we have been abandoned, we are not alone. Jesus is still there. Nothing, not even our pain can take him away from us.

And Jesus comes upon Simon Peter's mother in law in bed with a terrible fever. She, like all of us, are important to the Lord. He has worked for her. He reaches out to her, cures her, and she waits on the disciples. Then Jesus comes upon many people suffering the results of evil in our world, for all pain and suffering and death is due to mankind's original and continual turning away from the Lord of Life. He sees them reaching out to him and he reaches out to them.

Today all of us are told that when we are suffering, in any manner whatsoever, we must reach out to the presence of God in every aspect of life. We believe that he is present for us and with us through it all. We believe that he cries out with us sharing our pain. Now, we must use this special presence of the Lord as a way to come closer to the God who loves us, who was one of us, who died for us and who gave his life, eternal life, to us.

Today we ask God, "When the difficulties of our human condition weigh heavily upon us, dear Lord and Divine Lover, teach us how to pray."

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READINGS OF THE WEEK

Job 7:1-7 1 Corinthians 9:16-23 Mark 1:29-39

February 8, 2015

靈 修 生 活

約 伯 的 困 惑

有一天，父親和兒子經過一處，兒子低頭看見一隻小狗臥在地上，就好奇的問父親那隻小狗為何在地，父親上前一看，回頭就對兒子說：「牠死了」。兒子看見那隻狗動也不動的躺臥著，停了一陣子就問父親：「死？我會死嗎？你會死嗎？媽媽會死嗎？公公會死嗎？纒纒會死嗎……」父親對兒子說：「親愛的，一切為你珍貴的都會離開你的！我們每人都會死，所以要去珍惜一切。」這故事聽後覺得怎樣呢？這個殘酷的現實，不能讓這小小年紀的他去知道！應該說天堂的美麗故事讓他們把那生離死別的現實轉移。否認痛苦的存在、逃避面對失去的事實、憧憬於虛幻的夢境中，是人們面對傷痛時經常有的處事方式。

這主日的讀經中的約伯不就是處於這困惑中嗎？他本就是兒孫滿堂，事業成功，為人所羨慕，被視為天主所祝福的義人，如日中天，成為「一無所缺」……就是這份突如其來的噩耗，使他完全失去一切可以依仗的，就是在人前稱譽之清白也可能崩潰，朝日就從高處滑落，成為「一無所有」似的赤貧。這惡運使他咒罵自己的生日，為發生的事「不甘心」，在他內只有悽楚、幻滅、空虛與黑暗，他的生命與死人無異，把自己的生命與人群隔離，把自己困在靈魂的牢獄中。

講到骨子裡就是「不甘心」，天對我真的不公平，我不是壞人，又沒有做傷天害理之事，為何這事發生在我身上，不是在他/她身上！很多時就是這個不甘心使人完全失去鬥志，處於消沉的狀態中，對生命失去信心。

我們所熟悉的天主，祂沒有把人的歷史交予「無奈」，讓人處於無知中被罪惡所困惑；祂以一顆單純的心介入我們的歷史中，祂也被歷史的「命運」所牽繫，讓人赤裸裸的認識這位降生可見的天主。在這個主日福音中，耶穌從日落到日出，不斷宣講、醫治、驅魔等都是把人生命中的無奈注入希望、在不自主的被操縱中解放出來，把生命力從人的臭皮囊中釋放。那時西滿的岳母發熱，聖經說：耶穌走到她面前，拉著她的手，扶她起來……她就起來服侍他們。而耶穌的出現就使她「起來」和「服侍」；在這段福音中「扶起」亦可解說「使他起來」，這正回應雅各伯使徒有關傅油聖事的記載「主會使他起來」，意思包括「醒來、起身、釋放和重獲生命」；在人重得生命後，他會起來服侍，意思就是再次進入人群中參與，發揮和創造。疾病實在使人困擾、無力、自我孤立、甚至失去生命力，無法與人類的群體認同。耶穌宣講福音、驅魔和治好疾病的寓意正好表示天主介入人類歷史中，讓我們以信德打破無奈，以希望打破宿命，以愛德打破隔膜。

耶穌這份再造生命的使命不是對著那被選的以色列人，而是「我們到另一地方，到鄰近的村莊去罷……」這個宣佈新生的使命今天就落在「重獲新生後」的傳播福音者身上，不再孤立自己，成為喜樂的福音傳播者。

禱文：主耶穌，多謝祢在痛苦中仍然陪伴著我，並給我帶來永生的希望。有了祢，我不害怕；有祢同行，我就有足夠力量面對現時的疾苦，並效法祢，以我痛苦作奉獻，為我的家人，及所有受苦的人代禱。亞孟。

本 週 讀 經

二 零 一 五 年 二 月 八 日

約 7:1-7; 格前 9:16-23; 谷 1:29-39