

12TH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME B/2006

The problem of evil and suffering is one of the oldest of humanity and the most intriguing in the history of humankind. The Bible contains surely the traces of such a burning problem as in the book of Job. The question the book of Job raises is all about the meaning of suffering in the life of a just man and its consequences for human attitude toward God. These questions can be summarized as follows: - Is it possible to gravely suffer and to keep believing in God? – If God is Creator and Master of all things, why does he allow or let suffering exist in the world? – Why do the just and the innocent people suffer?

The answer the book of Job gives to all these questions is simple, but enlightening: suffering is part of human life. As such it is inescapable; its presence in the world does not put into question God's providence or his omnipotence might. That is the reason why in the 1st reading, there is a kind of reprimand in the answer God gives to Job about his complaint before him. In other words, God is inviting Job to accept his plan in his creation and, in spite of his sufferings, to trust him. In fact, God simply asks for unconditional trust in his love. In spite of anything to the contrary, people must believe that God guides all the events of history and the life of each person for his good. Be mindful of the wonderful words of St Paul in Romans 8, 28: "We know that all things work for good for those who love God"

Such an assertion has nothing to do with the sentiment of resignation or the feeling of powerlessness in the sense that whatever we might do, we cannot overcome suffering and its corollary death. It is neither based on human optimism that believes "it is going be okay", that even if we are tossed by storms a slack period will come. On the contrary, such an attitude is established on a trustful confidence and a firm conviction of faith that God is with us even if we go through some dark nights in our lives, that he will never abandon us. God knows everything happening in our lives, he sees everything and he can act to help us. All this helps us understand what is at the stake of today's Gospel as Jesus is reproaching his disciples their lack of faith.

As a matter of fact, the violent squall and waves which toss the boat are just the symbol of difficulties, hardships, misfortunes, oppositions and conflicts that cross our lives. At times, we feel really overwhelmed by all these events to the point that we have a terrible impression that God is not only asleep, but far away from us, silent and even completely absent. Storms and squalls strike anywhere and anyone; they strike institutions as well as individuals with them. Today's Gospel is telling us that we should not be astonished if injustice, misunderstandings and dramatic situations happen in our midst and in our lives. They are part of our life. If so, what is required is to keep our trust in God in time of joy as well as in time of distress.

In this perspective, the reproach of Jesus to the disciples means that they have forgotten that the Master was with them and, for that reason, nothing bad could happen to them. Would it have been that they perish in that boat, would not Jesus die with them? What a wonderful thing than to die with the assurance of having your Lord with you? But was that scenario possible? The mistake of the disciples, which Jesus calls lack of faith, was that they have recourse to Jesus only when their situation became desperate. One who has faith in Christ does not remember him only when things go

wrong. In fact, there are Christians who pray God only when they are victims of some misfortune or accident. They suddenly become capable of intense prayer so that he may come to their rescue. Some others know well that God can change the course of history, but they think that in practice he just sleeps most of the time, letting events follow their course. On the contrary, let us not forget that Jesus, even if asleep, is always with us. For that reason, we can also say that his silence and sleep were just apparent.

Another thing we learn from this text is the importance of the boat. When there is a storm on a sea and you are in a ship, you are more secure than to be there just swimming. To be in a boat means to be in a secure place, where the Lord is with us. That is the reason why the boat symbolizes also the church as this place where Jesus is with his disciples. In this context, the church is the place of salvation, where we cannot only encounter the Lord, but also where he shares and bears with us the fear of waves and squalls of life. Most significant is also the fact that the ones whose lives are spared from destruction and the sinking are those who are in the boat and not outside of it. Without being inside the boat we expose ourselves to countless dangers that can ruin our lives. In the same way, to be outside the church is to wander far from the Lord and from our salvation. There is salvation only with the Lord and inside the boat.

Jesus can give this salvation, because he has received all power from his Father to do so. We see already the expression of this power in his command over the wind and the sea. The sea and the wind symbolize the negative forces contrary to God and all the powers of evil that tries to destroy our lives. They cannot overcome the power of Jesus received from his Father. All those who choose Christ enjoy his protection against evil. All these benefits Jesus has brought them to us through his death and resurrection.

As St Paul says, Christ has died and risen on our behalf. Therefore, as Christians, we should also live for him and like him who sacrificed his life for us. His example should encourage us to follow him along the same way of total generosity and self-giving toward our brothers and sisters. Here lies our duty as his followers.

The last message I would like to highlight is about the consequence of Christ death and resurrection for us. Because Christ has died for us, we should focus our life on him and not on our past. "Whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; new things have come". We are invited to be optimistic, not to look back to sin of the past life. There is no reason of being anxious about our sins and errors. Let us look ahead; let us be guided by hope. Let us not go back to our past. Let us hold Christ forever. May God bless each one of us to focus on him and to put our life into his hands!



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