

Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time B/2009

When people are moving through difficult times, as in the case of a serious illness or an incurable disease, a question comes often on their lips: Why me? Why only me? Why I am condemned to go through this entire situation? Why does not God intervene and put an end to my misery? Why does not he do something to alleviate my suffering?

As legitimate as these questions might be, they show us that suffering is a mystery that can blindly strike anyone. As it is difficult for us to comprehend totally the meaning of suffering, it is also difficult for us to understand the reason why we have to undergo it.

Whatever might be our experience of suffering, one thing is sure. We are not the first to suffer and ask questions relative to it. Many people before us and in the past have gone through the same experience and raise the same questions. All the readings of this Sunday invite us to meditate on the meaning of human suffering and its impact on our faith in God.

The first reading recalls the story of Job and the evolution of his faith as he was confronted with human suffering. In fact, it was when Job was at the top of his life, successful in business and prosperous in family, that he was struck down by misfortune. Like any one of us, he complained before God; he asked him why he could not prevent all that to happen to him.

The text we have today is God's response to Job. In this response, God shows Job how he is the creator and the master of the universe. He has created everything that exists and has ordained everything skillfully with a plan. He has put boundaries to the seas and limits to the earth. Therefore, he has power to do things that humans cannot explain or understand.

If that is the case, the point of the text is to invite Job to accept God's plan for him, to trust God and hope that he will not abandon him, in spite of the suffering of the moment. Like for Job, God asks of us that in our own suffering we do not lose trust and hope in him. Suffering is like a dark night coming upon someone. But every night, as long as it might be, always has a dawn. Even in the middle of serious suffering, God is still with us. He guides all the events of our life for a good ending. As St Paul says, "We know that all things work for good for those who love God" (Romans 8, 28)

In whatever might happen to us, we need strong faith and an unconditional trust in God. Even if our life is tossed up by a storm of sufferings and illness, a period of calm and consolation by the Lord will come. Even if we go through some dark nights in our lives, we have to be sure that the Lord will soon or later intervene, because it is his promise that he will be with us until the end of the world. He knows everything that is happening to us. He sees everything that is happening to us, because he is with us always. All this helps us understand what is at the stake in today's Gospel as Jesus is reproaching his disciples for their lack of faith.

The reproach of Jesus to the disciples means, indeed, that they have forgotten that he was with them in that storm. For that reason, nothing bad could happen to them. Would it have been that they perish in that boat, would not Jesus also die with them? What a wonderful thing than to die with the assurance of having the Lord at our side? But was that scenario even possible?

As it can be seen, the mistake of the disciples lays in the fact that, in this critical situation, they had doubt in the power of Jesus to protect them. They thought they were alone and struggling alone. And yet, the sleep of Jesus was not a sleep at all. Even in sleep, Jesus is always awake and alive. Plus, the disciples had recourse to Jesus only

when their situation became desperate. In fact, Jesus does not want us to call upon him only when things go terribly wrong, but at any time. Our faith teaches that any circumstance of life, be it of joy or sadness, is an equal opportunity to open our hearts to the Lord and burst in prayer. The problem, however, is that some people think of God only when they are victims of misfortune and bad luck. And when their situation improves, they sink back into their routine and turn the back from God. Today's Gospel invites us to the awareness of the continual presence of the Lord Jesus in our lives and to our Christian responsibility before God.

The Gospel teaches us also that Jesus is a powerful savior sent to us by the Father. The negative forces of life and all the power of evil that tries to destroy us cannot overcome him. This is why he is able to calm the storm on the sea and to let the wind obey him. Whenever Jesus is present, there is peace and serenity. He can give us peace when the storms of life and problems assail us. But we have first to call upon him. We have to tell him what assails us and gives us anxiety. Then, he can command the wind and the sea to calm down and quiet.

All that does not mean, however, that we cannot have problems or suffer anymore. It means only that even in such a case, we are not alone; we are not struggling alone, because Jesus is with us, sharing our pains with us. That is the reason why, in the worst of their suffering and disease, some people have given us a strong example of courage, trust and faithfulness to God until the last minute of their lives.

A last lesson we learn from the Gospel is the symbolism of the boat. To be in a boat means to be in a secure place, where the Lord is with us. The boat on the sea symbolizes the church as this place where Jesus is present in the midst of his disciples who are struggling with the problems of life. In this perspective, the church is the place of salvation, where we can encounter the Lord, and where he shares and bears with us the fears and the squalls of life.

Without being inside the boat we expose ourselves to countless dangers that can ruin our life. Like those who, in a storm, are protected by being inside a ship, so are those who are inside the Church. 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.

That salvation Christ has brought 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 generosity and total dedication of our lives for our brothers and sisters.

Today we salute and celebrate in a very particular way those men who have always given the best of themselves for the sake of their beloved one, that is, our fathers. May God bless all our fathers, living and dead, for the wonderful work they have done to bring us up. Let us pray also for those who have never known their fathers and whose memory they grieve. May God bless all new fathers and those who will soon become fathers. May he help them through the difficult task of the education of their children. May the Lord help us all to trust him in our moments of trials and suffering by putting our lives into his hands.

Job 38, 1. 8-11; 2 Corinthians 5, 14-17; Mk 4, 35-41



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