

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time B2024

I believe that each one of us has had the experience of suffering, misfortunes, pain and even death. When we go through such experiences, we realize how human life is fragile and human achievements insecure. Sometimes the first question that comes to our mind is why? Why me? Why now? Why is it so? At other times, we even question the relevance of human life and the pertinence of human existence itself.

That is what we see in the first reading of today. Job was a devout and rich man. Suddenly and inexplicably he lost everything. The acuity of his suffering brought him to a difficult situation and a cry before God. In his cry, he shows how human life is empty and toil without rest. He compares himself to a worker who longs for a rest he cannot have and waits for a wage he cannot receive. When he tries to sleep, all that he receives is a sleepless night that reminds him of the hopelessness of life and the near approach of death.

Even if the cry of Job is strong, it is not however, a desperate shout. It is a realistic cry of someone confronted with the hidden face of human existence that happiness, joy and pleasure often hide from us. But who can give an explication to what seems a mystery to human beings than God himself? As Psalm 30 says: "You changed my mourning into dancing; You took off my sackcloth and clothed me gladness. With my whole being I sing endless praise to you. O Lord, my God, forever will I give you thanks." (Ps 30: 12-13)

At least that is how the French Philosopher Gabriel Marcel sees suffering, sickness and death. In the light of the Holy Scriptures, Gabriel says that suffering is not a problem, but rather a mystery. A problem is something within my reach, which I can analyze and to which I can find a solution even if there are unsolved problems. A mystery, however, is something which is totally beyond my reach, which I cannot deal with as I do with a problem, because it transcends me and my knowledge.

Suffering is a mystery. The mystery of suffering finds its ending only when, beyond questioning and revolt, we rely on God. There we learn through faith that, even in the darkest moments of our suffering, God has not abandoned us; he is with us all the way through, sharing with us the ups and downs of our human fragility and the twists of our life.

It is by contemplating the life of Jesus Christ that we can better understand the mystery of suffering. Like anybody, Jesus went through pain, suffering and death, but God triumphed in him by giving him life back through the resurrection. Therefore, our own sufferings are not a limitation, but a condition preceding the abundant life that God wants to give us.

Such a vision clarifies the healing of Peter's mother-in-law as well as that of many people Jesus healed in his time. Jesus has cured her in order to show that God has the power to heal bodily, spiritually, physically and mentally. However, though she was healed, Peter's mother-in-law eventually died. Then, we understand that her healing had a character of example. It stands for us as an example about what Jesus can do for us and within us. What it means in reality is that Jesus heals us in

many ways, physically, emotionally, and spiritually, but it does not mean that we can escape the reality of physical death.

Therefore, suffering and death are an integral part of the human condition and of what it means to be human. It would be an illusion to think that, because we believe in God, we cannot get sick, suffer and die. As there is no resurrection without Good Friday, so there is no resurrection without passion and death. As we share in the life of our Lord Jesus through baptism, so we share in his passion and resurrection.

The life giving power of our Lord is carried out in the Church through the sacraments, especially through the sacrament of the anointing of the sick. When the priests visit the sick and anoint them, they bring into their homes, the nursing homes and in the hospitals the healing power of Jesus, who heals in an invisible way, our bodies and our souls.

In the sacrament of the anointing of the sick, our Lord strengthens us with his power to accept the outcome of our life which can, sometimes, end up in death. In that case the sacrament of the anointing of the sick invites us to join our suffering to the suffering of our Lord so that with him God may give us life. The sacrament of the anointing of the sick makes us serene and capable of conforming ourselves to the will of God by resembling Jesus: “Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still not my will, but yours be done.”

By suffering in union with our Lord, who gave his life on the cross for us, our suffering stops being senseless. It becomes a channel of communication that links us to our Lord. It helps us grasp how through his own suffering our Lord sanctifies us and prepares us for the day in which God will dry every tear from our face, and there will be no longer sickness, or weeping, or pain. Thus, the sick are not passive members of the Church, but the most active and most precious members. In God's eyes, one hour of their suffering, endured with patience and faithfulness, can be worth more than all the activities of the world, if they are done only for oneself.

The strength and the serenity of our Lord Jesus in face of suffering came from his complete abandonment in the hands of the Father through prayer. Let us join him in this Great Prayer of thanksgiving, which is the Eucharist. Let us ask him in the reception of the Holy Communion to heal us, our families, and all those we love who are hurting today. May he heal all those that “St Andrew Prayer-Tree” has presented for our petition!

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



Homily Date: February 4, 2024
© 2024 – Fr Felicien I. Mbala, PhD, STD
Contact: www.mbala.org

Document Name: 20240204homily.pdf