

5th Ordinary Sunday
February 7, 2021
“A Witness in Suffering”

Job 7:1...7
1 Cor 9:16...23
Mk 1:29-39

My Brothers and Sisters in the Lord –

Most people aren't adults very long before they are confronted with some of the great hardships of life for themselves or for their loved ones. A life-altering accident, a serious disease like cancer, the untimely death of a parent or child, chronic pain, a disability, the loss of a business or income, estrangement from a family member – any of these things – can bring pain, anxiety, sleepless nights, and an overwhelming sense of hopelessness.

Some become depressed. Some will turn to alcohol or prescription drugs – especially if they live with chronic pain. Some will turn to others for support or therapy. And, sadly, some will even take their own life!

However, those who are able to cope best of all, are those who turn to God. Moreover, if and when they turn to God, they begin to understand that suffering is part of the “great panorama of life” – and this panorama always has elements of mystery within it!

Job, of the Old Testament reading, certainly understood suffering. He had lost all of his children, all of his great wealth, his physical health, and the sense of God's presence. He also incurred the disdain of his wife and his friends. At one point, his wife even urged him “to curse God and die”!

So, today, Job states that all of life is a drudgery. We are like hired servants or even slaves! There is no escape – and even sleep will not come when the pain and the anxiety are incessant! However, Job did not curse God; but he questioned God, nevertheless. And God gave him no answers! Suffering is a mystery for the innocent victim. It can also be a test. Suffering, if accepted, can bring peace and hope for a future that would take place only with the coming of Jesus – and Job's ultimate restoration symbolizes that!

In the Gospel of Mark, God reveals through Jesus that there is more to life than our experience here. There is more to pain and suffering than the death that our life here inevitably brings. Every cure that Jesus worked, every possession he eliminated – was a sign that the Reign of God had begun.

The Kingdom of God, in its heavenly fullness, awaited all those who accepted Jesus and his teaching, kept his commandments, and lived as faithful disciples during their time here.

In the great parable of the Book of Job, Job eventually recovered more than all he had lost. However, it was only in his own lifetime, because the scripture writer had no knowledge of a blessed and eternal afterlife.

Nevertheless, Jesus was no parable. He was the real thing! Furthermore, the fullness of life in the kingdom he promised was true. It was a reality that was proved when Jesus rose from the dead!

Other than those in ministry, most disciples preach the Gospel through the witness of their lives. However, today, St. Paul tells us that we can do this willingly or grudgingly.

Yet, there is no escape from the obligation that every Christian has to be an example of how to live the Gospel. We are to be a blessing for everyone whom we meet, as well as for those with whom we live and associate.

No one has an easy life. Even the extremely wealthy and those with robust health are not exempt from suffering and eventual death. Moreover, the greatest suffering in this life is to feel bereft of God. It is to have no belief in God or hope for an eternal life beyond our life here.

Consequently, in every case, we are to meet people where they are. We must relate to all people as Jesus did – and Paul, after him. Thus, we can bring compassion to those who suffer – We can bring forgiveness to those who have sinned – We can bring true mercy to those who are poor and deprived of material necessities – We can bring hope and emotional support to those who are in the throes of hopelessness and despair. And we can open up the possibility that there is something more for those who refuse to believe.

Brothers and Sisters, the life of a Christian disciple is a challenging one because it opens us to everyone in the world in a different way. It can be achieved only through prayer and the presence of God. Jesus, himself, had to draw apart to be alone with his Father at frequent intervals. And so, let us pray that we learn to make time alone with our Divine Father every day of our lives!

Amen.

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Msgr. Russell G. Terra