

[Isaiah 53:10-11; Psalm 33; Hebrews 4:14-16 Mark 10:35-45]

A while back, I received an e-mail message that was entitled “Things I Really Don’t Understand.” It had a list of questions for which there seems to be no clear-cut answer. Here are a few of them:

- Why do doctors and lawyers call what they do “practice?”
- Why is “abbreviation” such a long word? Why is a boxing ring square?
- What was the best thing BEFORE sliced bread?
- How do they get the deer to cross the highway at those yellow signs?
- How did a fool and his money get together in the first place?

These questions represent a lighthearted humorous reminder that there are indeed many things in this life that we just really don’t understand. There are so many things in this life that we just cannot comprehend.

We don’t really understand disease. Why is a youngster perfectly healthy for 13 years of his life... and then suddenly just happens to be in a place, where he suddenly encounters some germ or bacteria that invades his body and destroys it?

And we don’t understand accidents. They are so random and indiscriminate. You start out a day that is like any other day... and then something happens in a matter of seconds... and life is forever different. You can never go back beyond that accident. On and on we could go with our list... of things we don’t really understand.

All of these difficult questions prompt us to raise yet another crucial question: What can we count on from God? When we face the

troubles of the world, the heartaches of life, and the tough challenges of this existence... what can we count on from God?

The First Reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, says that even though Isaiah himself suffers so much for his community of faith, his faithful followers know that their Suffering Servant would die, and would live in “fullness of days.” He would live forever in the lives of believers who would be taught his teachings.

That first line of today’s First Reading has always been a problem to me. “The Lord was pleased to crush him in infirmity.”

It would lead people to say those very harmful words in the face of suffering, pain, loss or death, “It must be God’s will.” That kind of God somehow sadistically enjoys making us suffer and squirm.

God is like someone in a back yard holding a magnifying glass over an ant to watch it fry in the intensified heat, or like pulling the wings off a common house fly and see it can fly before it dies.

No, my God doesn’t operate like that.

When an automobile accident claimed the life of his son, someone tried to comfort a Protestant minister with the cliché: “It is God’s will.” He thundered back, “The heck it is! When my boy was killed, God was the first one who cried!” Now THAT sounds like my kind of God! No wonder that the first Christians would rely heavily on this passage from Sacred Scripture, especially during times of their own persecution, imprisonment, torture and death.

Our passage from the Letter to the Hebrews echoes the sentiment that we DO have a high priest who IS able to sympathize with our weaknesses; one who has been tested in every way yet did not sin. We CAN approach Jesus with confidence to receive the

mercy and the grace we need from His Cross and Resurrection to help us on our pilgrim way.

So it IS NO'T God's will when bad things happen to good people: illness and death, unemployment, changing schools, or when the car breaks down. LIFE happens. And Jesus helps us to deal with it, because the same LIFE happened to HIM, in many of the same ways.

Today is World Mission Sunday. Three powerful words. "Sunday:" the Day of the Lord when we remember and we become what Jesus did for us. "Mission:" we gather to scatter, to go out to all the places where we live and work and pray and play, giving witness.

We do this concretely for others out of our love for Jesus -- by meeting the spiritual, physical and mental needs of others. "World:" to remind ourselves that what we do is not just for our parish, our archdiocese or our country. It is universal, "Catholic" in Greek.

Our mission is to the almost-saints and to the big sinners, to the rich and to the poor, to men and women, to the young and to the old and to the in-between. Ours is a worldwide mission to make Jesus known and visible.

On this World Mission Sunday, we recall that even today, missionaries around the world are tramping through forests and deserts and mountains of self-denial both near and far for the sake of the Gospel and in the name of the Church, sometimes even to the point of suffering and death. They do this on our behalf, and with our prayers and our funds. Their "pain" is gain for everyone. Support them with your prayers and with your contributions.

This week's reflection questions:

- When have you had to endure suffering and pain with Jesus?
- In what ways have you felt God's kindness?

We are called to approach God with confidence and with boldness. Because we know that Jesus Christ went ahead of us and left us an example to follow.

So now we can receive God's grace and mercy and peace. Because THIS is God's will for us! AMEN!