

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

Recently, 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 a lot of things in this life that we just really don’t understand. There are so many things in this life that we just can’t comprehend. We don’t really understand disease. Why is someone reasonably healthy, and then suddenly just happens to be in a place where he or she encounters some germ or bacteria or a virus like COVID-19 that invades their 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.

- Why is there so much pain in our world?
- Why do good people suffer?
- Why do we hurt one another?
- Why can’t people get along?
- And why do some of the best prayers seem to go unanswered?

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 verses of our First Reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah have some of the verses which are described as the Fourth Suffering Servant Song.

The people of Israel knew that a Messiah was on his way, but they were hundreds of years away from realizing His arrival on earth in the person of Jesus Christ. Isaiah himself suffered so much for his community of faith that the faithful followers knew that if their Suffering Servant would die, he would live in “fullness of days.” He would live forever in the lives of his descendants, or at least in the lives of the new generations 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 and unhelpful words in the face of suffering, pain, loss or death, “It must be God’s will.” That God somehow sadistically enjoys making us suffer and squirm.

It sounds like 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 of a common house fly and see it struggling to escape before it eventually dies. No, my God doesn’t operate like that.

When an automobile accident claimed the life of his young 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 after Jesus Christ died, rose and went to Heaven 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 NOT 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. This week's reflection questions:

- How does Christ know your weaknesses?
- When have you had to endure affliction for Jesus' sake?
- In what ways have you felt God's kindness?
- When and how has God rescued you?

Our mission – the same mission given to the first followers of Jesus Christ -- is for us as well. Whether we are near-saints or big sinners, rich or poor, men or women, young or old or in-between. Ours is a world-wide mission to make Jesus known and visible. To strive, to celebrate and to serve.

That's what we are called to do: to approach God with confidence and with boldness. Because we know that Jesus Christ went ahead of us. Because we believe that we can accept the baptism and drink from the Cup of Communion with God, the Cup of Christ's Passion, Death and Resurrection, the Cup of Salvation. And then we can receive God's grace and mercy and peace. Because THIS is God's will for us! AMEN!