



Bringing Home the Word

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)

February 9, 2020

Humble Bright Lights

By Fr. Mark Haydu, LC

Saint Paul says he came to the Corinthians in weakness and that he didn't use eloquent or persuasive words; rather he evangelized them in humility and with signs of the power of God. He doesn't claim to be a powerful or influential preacher. He was a humble and convinced apostle. Thus, when he evangelized, the power of God was at work in him.

Of course, Paul's humility doesn't mean he didn't make the best case possible for the faith. On the contrary, we

are all called to profess and witness to the truth and to develop and use all our gifts and talents. Paul is simply stating that what is most important is that we remain open to the stirrings of the Holy Spirit within us and maintain our confidence in God and not in our own qualities or abilities.

If we are humble servants of the truth, then God's power will be shown. Isaiah prophesies that if we live charity in a real way—offering food to the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked—then our light will shine its strongest. Not only that, but our own personal wounds, whatever they are, will be healed. Truly, loving others is the best way to heal our own soul.

Isaiah proclaims further that if we live this way, God will have our backs. In biblical terms, "the glory of the LORD shall be [our] rear guard" (Isaiah 58:8). The Lord is a soldier who walks behind us, covers our blind spots, curtails our weaknesses, and protects and defends us. If God is for us, who can be against us? Let your light shine! +

*Isaiah proclaims that
if we live charitably,
God will have our backs.*

Sunday Readings

Isaiah 58:7–10

If you lavish your food on the hungry and satisfy the afflicted;
Then your light shall rise in the darkness.

1 Corinthians 2:1–5

I came to you in weakness and fear and much trembling, and my message and my proclamation were not with persuasive (words of) wisdom.

Matthew 5:13–16

You are the light of the world.
A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden.

A Word from Pope Francis

Christian life has to be a life that must blossom in works of charity, in doing what is good. But if you have no roots, you cannot blossom, and who is the root? Jesus!... "What blossoms a tree bears come from what lies underneath it." Never cut off Jesus' roots.

—General Audience, March 21, 2018



REFLECTION
QUESTIONS

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REFLECTION

- How do I live out God's love at home? In my workplace? In public?
- How can my light shine even brighter this week?

Why Do We Suffer?

By Fr. Michael D. Guinan, OFM

Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria. Wildfires in California. The Indian Ocean tsunami. Accidents, mass shootings, disease, and death. Natural disasters and those produced by humans bring with them so much suffering. Ancient literature from Egypt and Mesopotamia attests that even then people called out, “Why?” In Psalm 10:1, the psalmist cries out, “Why, LORD?” Our voices join an age-old chorus!

The problem of suffering is difficult. How can we understand a benevolent, just God in the face of such human experiences?

Perhaps the best biblical example of this struggle is found in the Book of Job. Job suffers the loss of possessions and family and is afflicted with a terrible disease. Friends hear of his plight and come to console him. After Job’s cry of pain, the discussion begins.

Why is Job suffering? One easy answer that surfaces immediately is that Job deserves it; he is suffering because of his sins. When Job rejects this, his friends counter, in effect, “Don’t give us that! All humans are rotten sinners!” For them, all suffering is somehow a punishment for sin. Sad to say, Job’s friends have vocal descendants even now. While it is true that our sinful actions have consequences, as an

all-purpose explanation, this one is too simplistic.

Problem or Mystery?

Even within the Book of Job, the situation is more complicated. As readers, we know from the start that his friends are wrong. Job is righteous, and his suffering is allowed by God to test his virtue. Other answers also appear in the book. Like any good ancient Near Eastern father, God disciplines us through suffering to make us better (5:17–18, 36:15). Or, suffering is mysterious, so who are we to understand God’s ways? (11:7–10, 15:8–9).



Although these responses may give temporary relief, ultimately they are not satisfactory answers to the meaning of suffering. While we seek understanding, perhaps this is not the best approach to the problem. In fact, maybe the problem with suffering is that it is not really a “problem” at all but a mystery.

What is the difference? A problem is something “out there.” We can see all the pieces, survey its dimensions. The question is, how do we put it together? How do we solve it? Problems are solved intellectually. A mystery is different. It is a situation in which I am so immersed that I can never get far enough away to see it all “out there.” Love and death are mysteries. So is suffering.

Mysteries involve us on the deepest levels of our relationships with ourselves,

others, the natural world, and with God. To be human is to be enmeshed in these relationships. When they grow into greater wholeness (through love) or come apart (through suffering), we are in the presence of mystery. We will never solve the meaning of suffering any more than the meaning of love.

“I Am with You”

At the heart of Christianity is the affirmation that, through the Incarnation, Jesus entered into these relationships too. Jesus fully shared in the human condition. When he faced suffering and death, he also called out, “Why?” The Book of Mark quotes these as his last words from the cross: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34). We know that God did not forsake Jesus but raised him to everlasting life.

Nowhere in Scripture do we read, “Have faith in me, and you will understand everything, including suffering!” But we do read, whatever the suffering, “Do not be afraid, for I am with you.” We do not suffer alone. Together, we survive all suffering—even death itself! +



*Lord, you have blessed the world
with goodness and love.
Help me to use my gifts and talents
in accordance with your will.*

—From *Peaceful Meditations for Every Day
in Ordinary Time*, Rev. Warren J. Savage and
Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

February 10–15

Monday, St. Scholastica:
1 Kgs 8:1–7, 9–13 / Mk 6:53–56


Tuesday, Weekday:
1 Kgs 8:22–23, 27–30 / Mk 7:1–13

Wednesday, Weekday:
1 Kgs 10:1–10 / Mk 7:14–23

Thursday, Weekday:
1 Kgs 11:4–13 / Mk 7:24–30

Friday, Sts. Cyril and Methodius:
1 Kgs 11:29–32; 12:19 / Mk 7:31–37

Saturday, Weekday:
1 Kgs 12:26–32; 13:33–34 / Mk 8:1–10

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