

[Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Psalm 31; Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9; John 18:1-19:42]

Sometimes God really does give you more than you can handle. I really don't like blaming God for our troubles. I prefer to blame life, or YOU, or ME.

We did it. We're the ones who denied Jesus somewhere between three times and 77 times, just since Lent began. We sold him for a wad of cash, or a comfortable lifestyle, or a moment's peace. We took a snooze when Jesus asked us to pray. We kissed him in public, but looked the other way when He was abused. We twisted His words to suit our purposes, mocked Him with thin praise, and ran when He needed a friend, hid to save our skins.

"Jesus said, if anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Lk 9:23).

Yes, "I have the strength for everything through him [God] who empowers me" (Phil 4:13).

But maybe no -- quite possibly no -- "God doesn't give you more than you can handle." It's a popular quote, but not Scriptural.

It's religiously cultural and, most times, meant to be helpful. Comforting. Encouraging. Empowering. *Meant* to be.

On the other hand, perhaps LIFE does give you more than you can handle, and, like Jesus on his way to Calvary, you need some help. Perhaps sometimes you need your own Simon of Cyrene. And perhaps sometimes the strength God is giving you is the wisdom and courage to ask for help from others.

It could be the root of the problem, the misunderstanding, is first person/second person. Singular and plural. Pesky grammar.

God never gives me more than I can handle? Well, he certainly seems to.

God never gives you more than YOU can handle. Both singular "you"? Same problem.

God never gives me more than WE can handle. Now that has possibilities.

God never gives you (singular) more than you (plural, that is, you and others working together) can handle. Sounds good!

That could be it. But first let's have a little (catechetical, religious ed., CCD) review of how troubles on earth weren't part of God's original plan.

All down through history, all of our sins at best muddy the waters of what God invites us to do now, including accepting His offers of grace to do it. At worst, they cause ripples of pain that can stretch out farther than we can see or imagine. But let's be clear. That isn't to say those who face hard times and heartaches do so because they sinned -- "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (Jn 9:2). Yes, they sinned, but I sin, you sin, he or she sins. We sin, you sin, they sin.

So, yes, it can be said God/life never gives you more than you can handle because God gives the rest of us -- sinners all -- the opportunity, the privilege and the obligation to help you. Coupled with this, making it even easier to zip along on our merry way -- as if we needed to make it easier for ourselves -- is another far-less-than-helpful catchphrase: "pull yourself up by your bootstraps."

Never mind that it's unclear where that little chestnut originated or how one is supposed to pull oneself up by bootstraps, those leather loops on the backs or sides of some boots.

Dominic Albano from Dynamic Catholic says this: We all have darkness. We all have our own little version of Good Friday somewhere in our lives. There's something that hurts, something that's hard, something that's dark, and we want to find our way around it. We want to find a way to skip over it. We don't want to go through it. We want to get right to the Resurrection. We want to skip the death and get right to the Resurrection.

Even Jesus, right? Even Jesus is like . . . He's in the garden, and what's He say? "Lord, let this cup pass from me. Don't make me go through this. Isn't there a way around it? Isn't there a way I can skip over it?"

No. There is no way around the darkness in our lives; it's there. There is no way to skip over it. And Jesus shows us we've got to go through it.

I know it's easy, right? It's easy to want to skip the Good Fridays of our lives and just try to get to Easter. But God shows us in this Gospel

passage. It invites us to enter into the darkness for a while, to embrace it, to go through it, so we can get to Easter. What do we still have in common? Being kicked to the curb by life. Being called to the role of Samaritan. Needing help. Giving help. I and we. You (singular) and you (plural).

And in doing that we catch at least a glimmer of the Resurrection in a world that can seem so dark and cold and heartless. A brief, encouraging glimpse at what God had, and has, planned.

And here is what happens from the Acts of the Apostles: "They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one's need" (Acts 2:42, 44-45).

So, I guess it's true: God (or LIFE) never gives you (singular) more than you (plural, that is, you and others working together) can handle.

It's pretty easy to look around and conclude that one of the things humans do best is inflict suffering on one another. Christ's Passion draws attention to suffering, both what He endured because a group of leaders put their own power and security ahead of everything else, and what people have endured ever since for similar reasons. Yet Christ gathers up all suffering and death in His own. The Passion and Resurrection of Jesus forever ended meaningless suffering and death. All sacrifice, all loss, now has ultimate value because Christ offered Himself for sacrifice and rose again. You can participate in this redeeming sacrifice by exercising kindness wherever you find suffering.

We adore you, O Christ and we praise you. Because by Your Holy Cross, You have redeemed the world! AMEN!