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In a few moments you will hear what is called an *Offertory Sentence*. It is a verse of Scripture that is said at the beginning of the offertory, when we begin to set the altar with enough hosts and wine for all of you to receive communion. The offertory sentence is typically thematic, it elaborates upon the lessons for the day and the season of the year. However, this morning we have an offertory sentence that appears to be random, it's an odd choice in the way of offertory sentences, and rather long. It reads: *There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job: and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God: and Satan sought to tempt him: and power was given him by the Lord over his possessions, and over his flesh: and he destroyed all his substance, and his sons: and he smote his flesh with sore boils.*

It is odd in a sense because we have been prescribed a “nice, feel-good Mass” this morning. We have been encouraged and uplifted with scriptures such as *O Lord, the whole world is in thy power, and there is no man that can gainsay thee...blessed are those that walk in the law of the Lord*. We have prayed that we may be granted *pardon and peace, to be cleansed from our sins, and serve [God] with a quiet mind*. We have prayed that we may one day be numbered among the Saints of God. And St. Paul has taught us how to be strong in the Lord, by putting on the whole armor of God. He has reminded us that if we are suited in Christ's Amor, we shall be equipped to withstand the temptations and fiery darts of the enemy. In the Gradual we hear *Lord, thou hast been our refuge, from one generation to another...thou art God from everlasting, and world without end*. And in the Gospel we hear the account of Jesus healing a nobleman's little boy from a distance. And all is well. Until the offertory sentence.

It is a troubling reminder. If you think you are having a difficult time, that things are not going your way, consider the story of Job. Job was a saint in every sense of the word. He was *perfect and upright, he feared God*, and yet Satan sought to tempt him, and God gave Satan power to tempt him, and spared nothing, not even his possessions, his health, his cattle, or his children. In one day, all of this was taken from him. Messenger after messenger came running to Job bringing news of death and destruction. In an instant everything that Job had, even his family, was gone. All that was left was sackcloth and ashes, the traditional outward signs of mourning, his difficult wife -who had always been a trial, and his three friends. Yet, Job found no comfort from his wife and three friends either. His wife concluded that God had abandoned him and so advised him to *curse God and die*. His three

friends had the best of intentions and goodwill, had travelled a great distance to come and be at his side, tried to encourage him, but really only made matters worse. They tried to convince Job that his suffering was due to a sin he committed, or that his children committed, and that he even deserved to suffer more!

While it is true that sometimes the sins we commit eventually lead to suffering, Job committed no sin to deserve what his friends considered to be God's punishment. Put simply, Job was allowed to be tested, to prove to everyone and to Satan, that he was a man of faith. This is often what happens with the Saints. Our world has a misconception when it comes to the saints. We see the bright halo and forget the tests and hardships they endured. But the truth is that the great saints were ordinary men and women who like Job knew what it meant to suffer. Take for example, St. Paul; he was an ordinary man, and according to tradition a bit unordinary in his appearance -short, bowlegged, and bald. He was the apostle with the shocking past, literally having dragged off Christians to their deaths. Yet, once he had encountered Christ, he spent the rest of his life constantly on the move, he was stoned several times, barely escaped death by hiding in a basket, and survived being shipwrecked and lashed within an inch of his life. Another great saint, St. Monica of North Africa, experienced another kind of suffering, that of watching her son, Augustine, who spent many years worshiping false gods and living in sin before he found God and His Son, Jesus Christ. For decades she prayed to God for her son's salvation, and she lived just long enough to see him baptized. St. Therese of Lisieux is another saint who endured terrible suffering and hardship. She begged for years to be allowed to enter the convent, but upon her entrance to the religious life she was bullied and teased incessantly by the other nuns. This lasted until she caught tuberculosis, a terrible disease from which she suffered horribly and eventually died.

Like Job, the patience and trust of these great saints was tested to its very limit. Like Job they were tempted to despair over their circumstances, and just when they were about to give in, their faith and trust in God was rewarded and Satan was defeated. Job's faith was such that Satan was sent packing and Job was richly rewarded. Throughout all of Job's suffering he held fast to the truth, saying, *I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth...in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold.* God answered every question that he asked while he sat in sackcloth and ashes by the roadside. And God blessed him for his faithfulness. Everything that he had lost was restored to him double. St. Paul eventually gave his life for Christ, but

he left several churches which he had founded and spiritual children all over the known world of his day. St. Monica rejoiced to see her many years of prayers and tears come to fruition in her son's conversion and baptism. St. Therese found solace in her unshaking belief that Jesus would lift her up to heaven.

So the question for us to consider this morning is does God allow our faith and trust in him to be tested? And the truth is that He does. Not because He is vindictive, or a tyrant. But so that we may grow in our faith and trust in Him, and reveal our faith and trust in Him to others. Pain, trouble, suffering, and loss, these are all unpleasant parts of life. Holding on to our faith amid it all is how we grow into Christian maturity. It is learning that during life's storms God does not abandon those who still strive to seek Him. God does not abandon those who put their faith and trust in Him only. God intends to make us into His saints. And let us not forget that this journey to heaven, with all its pain, toil, and suffering, is not without God's consolations along the way. He has given us the Armor of Christ, the Gospel to guide us, and His own Body and Blood, heavenly food and drink, to strengthen us, fortify us, and encourage us for the rest of our lives. Amen.