

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Job 7, 1-7)

Job has a wonderful family and the largest estate in the kingdom. He never abused the power and privilege he enjoyed. He used his wealth for hospitality especially in helping the needy. No one went to Job's house for help left disappointed. But Job's piety and sanity are put to the test. In a series of disasters he loses his family, his friends, his fortunes, and his possessions. The only thing Job does not lose is his faith. Job is then afflicted with sores, from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head. The man who was described as the greatest figure in all the east is now afflicted with disaster and sickness.

What has Job done to deserve such a terrible faith? Why is he chosen to be God's victim? Why does Job have to suffer? Why should an innocent man face such a fate? Job is just voicing out what millions of people today are going through: hunger, pain, poverty, starvation, illness, injustice. Like Job they cried out: Where is God? Why does He allow all this to happen? Why to me?

In the Old Testament times it was thought that suffering was directly connected with people's conduct and that anyone who suffered has sinned. This view is represented by Job's friends who come to console him. They argue that Job had sinned. Job protested. He had not sinned. He has always loved God and his neighbors. He even challenges God to have the matter cleared up in the court of law.

Although Job refuses to believe that his suffering is a consequence of sin, he has no answer to satisfy himself. He shares the eternal question of the persecuted “Why me?” Indeed he holds fast to his faith in God but loses all his reasons for hoping that things will ever change. Job is never graced with an answer to the questions of suffering although his fortunes do change for the better. This man, who interrogated God and suffered a sorrow he did not deserve, is a symbol of all the innocents in history who wonder at their pain.

Job is familiar to all of us. If few of us share his innocence, all of us share his hurt and anguish and bewilderment. We have all lived through some of his questions and some of his despair. And we still wonder why suffering? When Jesus is confronted with concrete human suffering, He does not stay with the question “Why suffering?” but moved to heal the afflicted.

In today’s gospel (Mk. 1, 29-39) people are crowding around the door bringing with them the legion of the infirm and the broken. No doubt each of them has questions about the why of suffering but all of them share the same hope that Jesus will care for them. Jesus attends to their plight and heals them. Once the word is out about Jesus, every anxious “Job” in town emerges with his hurt showing. Jesus faces the sick with the love of God.

The questions of the suffering Job are not answered in the Gospel. Jesus may have His own questions about the needless suffering that surrounds Him, as He will have His own questions when His own suffering becomes passion. But whatever His questions are, Jesus stays committed to caring to the sick. That

is His witness. And that must be the enduring witness of His followers.

Through the witness of Jesus we hold fast to the truth that God loves us in our weakness and fragility, in our sickness and suffering. Christ can heal us. He can transform our despair into hope, our fear into courage, and our anger into acceptance. Maybe our physical sufferings may not diminish but we will have Jesus to support us as we endure them. Maybe our pain may find no relief but Jesus will be present to reassure us as we put up with it.

We can see a reflection of God's care in the commitment of doctors, nurses, healers, hospital chaplains, and all the people who tend to the sufferings of others. They are God's compassion in flesh, God's care in motion. No doubt all of them have reason to wonder, to protest, to be angry when they see the innocent suffer. But they carry on. That is their enduring witness. Like Jesus they know that the schedule care must be kept.

Amen.

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