Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time B/2015

The readings of this Sunday talk about human suffering. They show us that sickness and suffering are an integral part of the human condition. They invite us to put our sickness and suffering into the hands of God so that he might heal us and offer us solace.

The first reading describes the cry of Job in the middle of his suffering. It shows how the acuity of suffering has brought him to a desperate situation and hopelessness of life.

What is behind this text is the truth that human suffering reveals the fragility of the human condition and its precarious foundation. There is also the idea that suffering, pain and sickness disclose the hidden face of human existence that happiness, joy and pleasure often hide from us.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus cures the mother-in-law of Simon Peter. In fact, the Gospel starts with the healing of the mother-in-law of Simon Peter who was lying sick with fever. Then, it shows how after her healing, she was waiting on Jesus and his companions.

After that, the Gospel talks about many healings that Jesus performed as, from all over the town, they brought him people having various diseases and those who were possessed by demons.

In the end, the Gospel mentions the prayer of Jesus in the deserted place before going to the synagogue where he was preaching and driving out demons throughout the whole of Galilee.

What do we learn from today's readings? Today I want to talk about human suffering. In fact, we all want to be in good shape and good health; we all want to live a long, abundant and beautiful life. However, in spite of our wish and our good will, we all do have the experience of pain, suffering, sickness and eventually death.

Pain and suffering come to us in various ways. It takes different forms, namely mental, physical, psychological or emotional, etc. But whatever might be the form, it is always something painful and undesirable. When pain and suffering strike, people discover the fragility of the human condition and the limits of human life, as we heard in the book of Job today. Sometimes people question God; some resign simply to their fate; others revolt against God, but all the same they cannot find a solution to their pain and suffering.

The French philosopher Gabriel Marcel, in the light of the Holy Scriptures, tells us that suffering is not a problem, but rather a mystery. A problem is something within my reach, which I can analyze and to which I can find a solution even if there are unsolved problems. A mystery, however, is something which is totally beyond my reach, which I cannot deal with as I do with a problem, because it transcends me and my knowledge.

The mystery of suffering finds its ending only when, beyond questioning and revolt, we rely on God. There we learn through faith that, even in the darkest moment of our suffering, God has not abandoned us; he is with us all the way through, sharing with us the meander of our human fragility, with its ups and downs.

How do we come to such an easy conclusion? It is by contemplating the life of Jesus Christ. Like anybody, Jesus went through pain, suffering and death, but God triumphed

in him by giving him life back through the resurrection Therefore, our own sufferings are not a limitation, but a condition preceding the abundant life that God wants to give us.

Such a vision clarifies the healing of Peter's mother-in-law as well as that of many people Jesus healed in his time. Jesus has cured her in order to show that God has the power to heal both bodily and spiritually, physically and mentally. However, though she was healed, Peter's mother-in-law eventually died. In that perspective, her healing has a character of exemplarity. It stands for us as an example about what Jesus can do for us and with us. What it means in reality is that Jesus heals us in many ways, physically, emotionally, and spiritually, but it does not mean that we can escape the reality of physical death.

Therefore, suffering and death are an integral part of the human condition and of what it means to be human. That is why it would be an illusion to think that, because we believe in God, we cannot get sick, suffer and die. In truth, there is no resurrection without passion and death. As we share in the life of Jesus through baptism, so we share in his passion and resurrection.
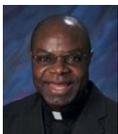
The life giving power of Jesus is carried out in the Church through the sacraments, especially through the sacrament of the anointing of the sick. In that perspective, when the priests visit the sick and anoint them, they bring into their homes, the nursing homes and in the hospitals the healing power of Jesus, who heals in an invisible way, our bodies and our souls.

In the sacrament of the anointing of the sick, Jesus also strengthens us with his power to accept the outcome of our life which can, sometimes, end up in death. In that case the sacrament of the anointing of the sick is to invite us to join our suffering to the suffering of Jesus so that with him God may give us life.

Let me now finish by inviting you to pray for the protection of life. In fact, as you know the Colorado House is planning to pass a bill on assisted suicide. I believe that as each one of us understands such a move promotes clearly the idea that we are masters of our life, that we can do with our life whatever we want. But, in truth, our life is a gift from God. We cannot dispose of it as we do with the waste we throw in the trash. Life is so precious that only God who has given it to us can put an end to it when his time is fulfilled. Any manipulation of human life is an attempt to undermine the dignity and the integrity of human life and is unacceptable.

Let us pray that God may help us to defend life and to oppose by all means any attempt to treat it as a disposal. May God bless you all!

Job 7: 1-4, 6-7; 1 Corinthians 9: 16-19, 22-23; Mark 1: 29-39

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