

Homily For Tuesday of the 26th Week of Ordinary Time - Year II
St Peter's 8:30am/7:00pm Masses - Sept 27, 2022

Memorial: St. Vincent de Paul

Job 3:1-3,11-17,20-23 "Why is light given to one who cannot see the way?"

Psalms 88:1-7 "I am counted among those who go down to the pit."

Luke 9:51-56 "When the days drew near for Jesus to be taken up, he set his face to Jerusalem."

The Meaning of Suffering

Introduction

There is an expression I remember from my childhood that I don't hear any more. Adults would comment on someone: "He has the patience of Job." As a child, I did not know what that meant. As an adult, I now know what they meant by patience, but I still don't know what they meant when they said that Job had this quality. He seems much more inclined to whining and complaining than to patient endurance of his suffering. If we read the full story of what happened to Job, we would probably be inclined to say that he had every right to complain and every right not to be patient.

Suffering is with us always. Some have much more and some have less, but there is always, sooner or later, a profound sense of loss or emptiness or pain, physical or mental suffering. In today's passages, we do get some different ways of approaching our suffering or that of others when it suffering seems pointless.

Job

Job has lost everything; his family, his possessions and his health. He is miserable, the result of Satan's attempt to prove that people only praise God when things are going well and will curse him when they are not. Job's friends also anticipate that Job will curse God. It is almost as if they are taking bets with each other on how long it will take.

Instead, Job curses his own life, and even the fact that he was born. Now all of the things he enjoyed don't mean anything to him. Why even be alive if life is mostly

suffering? I think you and I know that this is the argument of those who support euthanasia and assisted death when someone is suffering. They have the right problem, which is suffering but, instead of compassionate care, they have the wrong solution, which is to end life. This can seem like a reasonable solution in particular cases, until we realize that there is no end of the list of things we might consider as intolerable suffering. Even now, the lobbying is to place no limit on how young a person may be to access this option.

Job is not considering this option, but severely questions the value and meaning of his life. But here is Job's biggest problem that is not addressed in today's debate. Why suffer if we don't know the meaning of it, the reason for it? Job does not know why he is suffering. This is the worst affliction, even more than all he lost. If he only knew why he was going through this, he might, with the help of compassionate friends, be able to draw some redeeming meaning out of it.

Luke

Jesus, on the other hand, knows he is going to Jerusalem to suffer. He even predicts it. He "sets his face to Jerusalem" where he will suffer. But he knows his suffering has purpose. The verb that St. Luke uses means "to complete", "to consummate." Jesus is going bring to fullness his saving mission through crucifixion, death, and resurrection. On the cross, he will say, in victory over his suffering, "It is finished."

There is a cavern deep under the house of Caiaphas, the High Priest who condemns Jesus. It was used as a prison, and may very well be the place where Jesus lay on cold rock in total darkness after his arrest and phony trial. Today, you can walk down stairs and, with the help of artificial light, see the place where he lay, tempted by despair. At that time, there was only a hole through which a prisoner was lowered by rope into the pitch darkness. Today, the only thing you see there is a simple wooden lectern, with Psalm 88 on it. If you go there you can read this, today's psalm passage: "O Lord, God of my salvation, incline your ear to my cry. For my soul is full of troubles, and my life draws near to Sheol. I am counted among those who go down to the pit. I am like those who have no help. I

am like those forsaken among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, like those whom you remember no more, for they are cut off from your hand. You have put me in the depths of the pit, in the regions dark and deep. Your wrath lies heavy upon me." How many times in your life have you felt like you were forsaken or without help, in the depths of a pit. Remember O man or woman, that you are not alone. The compassionate one, who has been there before you, is with you now. You are not alone. Do not despair. Jesus determined to go through its worst so that you would know that there is meaning and purpose in every experience. You are made for the joy of heaven.

St. Vincent de Paul

St. Vincent de Paul, whom we honour today, spent many hours with those who had no hope. He grew up herding sheep, wanting to make as much money as possible, but became a priest, was captured by pirates, and sold into slavery four times before finally escaping. Life changing encounters with destitute people inspired him to begin work among the poor and marginalized.

He gathered the wealthy women of his parish to collect funds for missionary projects. From this group came the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul. He also founded an Order of priests who, during a time of general laxity and ignorance among the clergy, devoted themselves to serving in small towns.

Later he was named as the patron of the society which bears his name, founded by Blessed Frederic Ozanam. Those who participate in this ministry are called by his name. They are Vincentians. We have them in our parish, volunteers dedicated to being present with those who suffer from a lack of resources for a good life. His spirit is alive today, the Spirit that brought Jesus through his time of trial and is ready to do the same for ours and for those around us. I have chosen this statement of St. Vincent as representative of that spirit: "We should strive to keep our hearts open to the sufferings and wretchedness of other people, and pray continually that God may grant us that spirit of compassion which is truly the spirit of God."

Call To Conversion

I will conclude with two more statements that might inspire us to look recognize that suffering has meaning. The first is from Pope Francis: "True progress in spiritual life does not consist in multiplying ecstasies, but in being able to persevere in difficult times. Walk, walk, walk on and if you are tired, stop a little and then start walking again; but with perseverance."

And finally, from a contemporary spiritual writer, Fr. Jacques Philippe: "By accepting the sufferings 'offered' by life and allowed by God for our progress and purification, we spare ourselves much harder ones. We need to stop dreaming of a life without suffering or conflict. That is the life of heaven, not earth. We must take up our cross and follow Christ courageously every day. The bitterness of that cross will sooner or later be transformed into sweetness."

I could not say it better than that. I know because I tried. Let us take on the resolute face of our Lord, Jesus, whose suffering made all the difference. Then, maybe we will be encouraged to be that face for someone else.

Key Passages

Entrance Antiphon: *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me and sent me to preach the good news to the poor, to heal the broken hearted.*

Collect: *O God, who endowed the priest St Vincent de Paul with apostolic virtues, grant that, afire with that same spirit, we may love what he loved and put into practice what he taught.*

Job: *Job cursed the day of his birth. He said: "Let the day perish in which I was born. Why did I not die at birth? Now I would be lying down and quiet, at rest with kings. Or why was I not buried like a stillborn child that never sees the light? There the wicked cease from troubling and where the weary are at rest. Why is light given to one in misery, to the bitter in soul, who long for death, but it does not come? Why is light given to one who cannot see the way, whom God has fenced in?"*

Psalms: *O Lord, God of my salvation, incline your ear to my cry. For my soul is full of troubles, and my life draws near to Sheol. I am counted among those who go down to the pit. I am like those who have no help. I am like those forsaken among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, like those whom you remember no more, for they are cut off from your hand. You have put me in the depths of the pit, in the regions dark and deep. Your wrath lies heavy upon me.*

Luke: *When the days drew near for Jesus to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him. But they did not receive Jesus, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. James and John said, "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" But he turned and rebuked them.*