

The Disquieting Wisdom of Job

5th Sunday of Ordinary Time – Year B

**Job 7:1-4, 6-7
Psalm 147:1-2, 3-4, 5-6

1 Corinthians 9:16-19, 22-12
Mark 1:29-39

Why do bad things happen to good people? Why does a loving God allow innocent people to suffer? For many, the very issue of faith depends on the answer to this perplexing, but timeless dilemma.

The Book of Job seeks to answer that very question. Job is a wealthy, prosperous man, blessed with riches, flocks and family. The Book of Job opens, however, when God allows Job to be deprived of everything, sparing only his life, in order to test the true nature and stamina of his faith.

Throughout the majority of the book, Job's three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, try to persuade Job that he must have committed some sin, for which he is being punished with such sudden and tragic anguish. While lamenting the ultimate drudgery of life, Job remains resolute that he is innocent. Finally, in a dramatic defiance, Job demands an explanation for his suffering from God, Himself.

Rather than answer Job's question, however, God asserts His omniscience and almighty power -- "*Where were you when I founded the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding*" (Job 38:2); "*Will we have arguing with the Almighty by the critic? Let him who would correct God give answer!*" (Job 40:2). God brings Job to a new level of humility in the assertion: God does not require Job to understand why this happened; only to have faith that *God* understands why.



The Book of Job (1826) by William Blake

In the end, Job acquiesces to the ultimate wisdom of God, putting his faith in the simple truth that God has all the answers. He further yields to the reality that God will not always share those answers with us, nor does He need to.

Such is the Wisdom of Job. It is, however, a very troubling wisdom for a culture that values having the answers, having a reason for why things happen; that values thorough understanding and of being "in the know." However, it is a wisdom that is fundamental to our relationship with God.

This was the wisdom exercised by Abraham. He came from a pagan culture that sought to understand the cosmos and the

The Book of Job

divine in order to predict and manipulate them through rites and sacrifices. In Abraham's relationship with God, however, the first thing Abraham came to know about this new divinity was that he can never truly know it, nor could he predict or manipulate it. Rather, Abraham was called to do something very new - he had to have faith and complete trust in the guidance, direction and promises of God who did not always tell him everything.

This was the wisdom exercised by the early martyrs of the Church, who suffered persecution and death, not knowing why, nor what the future held for the Church; only having faith that God had a purpose. In hindsight we can declare, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church," but this was not so evident while the martyrs were suffering.

In our culture of being "in the

know," in which knowledge is power and awareness gives a sense of purpose, let us take up the challenge of the wisdom of Job. Good people will often be called to suffer, and we may be moved to ask "why".

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Knowing that God will not always give us answers, nor does He need to, let us have the grace to put our faith in the omniscience of almighty God, who has a purpose for everything, including the suffering we are called to endure - whose only answer to the question

"why" may, and very often is, "I do not require you to understand. Rather, you must have faith that I understand."

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February 3, 2012