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Faith and Suffering in a Fragmented World

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Faith and Suffering in a Fragmented World

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Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Sunday Readings for June 24, 2012 for Cycle B:

Jb 38:1, 8-11; Ps 107; 2 Cor 5:14-17; Mk 4:35-41

FAITH AND SUFFERING IN A FRAGMENTED WORLD

Lawrence E. Frizzell

How do we define the meaning of life? This central question for each of us should focus on our relationship with God. From ancient times this included the moral struggle between good and evil. An elderly sage epitomized the common answer in Ps 37. The wicked are alienated from God and will come to a bad end. It was a simple step from this assessment to judge that all those who suffer must be sinners. In a masterly drama, the Book of Job struggles to prove the inadequacy of this thesis. Attacked by his pious friends, who are convinced that he is a secret sinner, Job examines his conscience (ch. 31) and then challenges God to a court case. Let God vindicate himself for allowing the righteous to suffer!

The divine answer (ch. 38-41) is a long series of questions that effectively puts Job in his place. How can a creature penetrate into the Creator's mind? What qualifications does any human being have to challenge God? While in the end Job must stand in awe of the Creator, he is vindicated before his friends and God instructs him to pray for them (42:7-9).

The Gospel responds to human curiosity about suffering and sin by stating that there can a link (Jn 5:14) yet this must not be assumed lightly by others (Jn 9:2-3). We should not even judge our own case, and that is one of the reasons for the sacrament of penance and spiritual direction.

In this Sunday's liturgy the reading from Job provides a background to St. Mark's narrative about the storm on the Sea of Galilee. After teaching a large crowd, Jesus and his disciples took a boat to cross the lake. Exhausted, the Master fell into a deep sleep, undisturbed even by the storm that began to overwhelm them. What a picture of human insecurity as the disciples waken Jesus! "Teacher, do you not care if we perish?" He did not answer them directly, but rebuked the wind and ordered the sea to be calm. Then he questioned them: "Why are you terrified? Do you not yet have faith?" The reaction of the disciples changed from apprehension to awe. "Who then is this whom even sea and wind obey?"

Jesus had given his friends a lesson in trust. "In peace I will lie down and sleep; for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety" (Ps 4:8). Then Jesus showed another dimension of his intimacy with the Father. Long ago the Psalmist had proclaimed that God alone ruled the sea and calmed the storm (Ps 89:8-9). Slowly the disciples began to recognize that the works of Jesus point to his unique unity with God the Father.

"Do you not yet have faith?" Jesus could not expect his disciples to have full insight into his work, so he was pointing to faith as a relationship with God. St. Paul's letters to the Corinthians emphasized that the specific context of Christian faith in our relationship with God is rooted in the Death-and-Resurrection of Jesus. "Whoever is in Christ is a new creation," participating in

the life of Jesus that triumphed over death because of his obedient love of the Father. Grounded in this love, those who believe in Christ are urged to express a similar sacrificial love for others.

During his teaching ministry, Jesus was known first "according to the flesh," which refers to his human nature. The disciples came to a partial insight into the mystery of his divinity, but only after the resurrection did they know that all of Jesus' works were accomplished for their sake. Moreover, through Baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Church and her members become part of the new creation. However, the Church must live this experience in faith. Every generation is buffeted by the various storms that afflict humanity. The difference between the faithful and their brothers and sisters throughout the world is the presence of Jesus in the barque of Peter. Christ is Emmanuel (God-with-us) and is always present with those who recognize their need and their own limitations. "Do you not yet have faith?" The question now becomes: "Is your gift of faith being awakened by prayer?"