

Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year B

Twelfth Sunday of Ordinary Time

First reading: (Job 38.1-4, 8-11)

Job's Agony

The Book of Job is a brilliant, evocative piece of writing, exposing in all its anguish the problem of the suffering of innocent people. It is a timeless plaint, expressing the incomprehension and frustration of all those who suffer undeservedly. It may well have been provoked by the second generation of exiles in Babylon, suffering for sins that are not their own.

But it is a problem that brings agony in every age. Why should my child die young? Why should I be subjected to long and humiliating illness? Here, at the beginning of the saga, Job is so wound up that he curses the very day he was born. Throughout his struggle to understand, he has a love-hate relationship with God, wanting to be free of God's persecuting hand, but at the same time depending on, and attached to, that same protecting hand, confident that there is a solution. Despite what he sees as God's unacceptable bullying, he remains convinced that God's love will never forsake him. The two conflicting emotions seethe together throughout the Book, until the final vision of God's incomparable wisdom and glory convinces Job that God's purposes are beyond human reasoning. Job is calmed and comforted by the experience of the awesome and incomprehensible glory of God.

Question: *How is the suffering of the innocent compatible with the idea of a loving God?*

Second reading: (2 Corinthians 5.14-17)

The New Creation

In this reading of Second Corinthians, Paul is explaining that the Resurrection of Christ has radically changed everything. In this new creation, all our standards, hopes and expectations have undergone a transformation. He is perhaps already tilting at people who prided themselves on having known Jesus during his earthly life, and pitted their authority against Paul's own. Certainly, later in the Letter, he sets out to dispute the claims of some people of Jewish background who considered themselves 'super-apostles'.

Salvation is not achieved by this knowledge of the earthly Jesus. The message of the gospel makes sense only in the light of the Resurrection. The Risen Christ is the firstborn from the dead, and his Resurrection is the model for ours. This is the ultimate answer to Job's question: whatever sorrows earthly life may bring, if we are baptized into Christ's death, we will also share his Resurrection. We already share Christ's life and are being transformed into him. The life we are experiencing now is only a preparation for its fulfilment in Christ's Resurrection.

Question:

Is Paul exaggerating when he says that, with the Resurrection, everything old has passed away?

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Gospel:

(Mark 4.35-41)

Jesus Calms the Storm

Jesus certainly seems to have chosen a pretty dim and unappreciative group of disciples. They do call him 'Master', but after all these wonders they still don't really trust him, and have no hesitation about addressing him rudely and brusquely. Did you say, 'Just like me'? Well, perhaps I am just as untrusting.

We often behave as if Jesus were quietly snoozing, quite unconcerned about our troubles and concerns, as we struggle hopelessly, up to our necks in the mud and sinking rapidly. However, once Jesus' attention has been roused, once they have put their trust in him, he effortlessly remedies the situation.

This incident is the climax of a series of wonders, when we see Jesus' authority and command gradually increasing. First, he imperiously called the disciples and they followed. Then, he taught authoritatively in the synagogue as no other had ever taught. Next, he had the effrontery to forgive sins, as only God can do. Now, he controls the elements. Only God controls the wind and the waves, as in the psalms God 'walks on the backs of the waves'.

Hence, the astounded, awestruck reaction of the disciples. But, just like me again, they soon forget again and are surprised when Jesus comes to their rescue.

Question:

What are the qualities required by a disciple of Christ? Why did Jesus choose such an unappreciative bunch?
