

6B SML 2021  
MK 1:40-45

In my homily on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, I preached on the Seven Sorrows of Mary, seven “crosses” she accepted as a result of being the Mother of God. I then dug a little deeper regarding types of crosses, one of which is the cross of sickness.

Regarding His friend Lazarus who was sick, Our Blessed Lord said, “This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified in it.” (JN 11:4) It’s easier to accept one’s own illness. It’s the illness of another, especially a child or a baby that’s so hard to accept.

Resignation to the cross of sickness is one of the very highest forms of prayer.

The thought behind my sermon on December 8<sup>th</sup> and the sermon this evening/morning is the sickness of a one-year old granddaughter of a parishioner, with whom I am in frequent contact. His granddaughter has leukemia, and the doctors have tried everything they know from Atlanta to Cincinnati, up to and including a bone marrow transplant, and their living breathing saint has suffered: rash, nausea, hypertension,

vomiting blood, swollen gums and lips, ventilator, ICU, the list goes on. I bring up this sadness as the cross of sickness is one of the very highest forms of prayer, in an attempt to explain why God permits evil things for the greater good, as related to His love and the salvation of our souls. Many of us has someone, had someone, or will have someone in their lives as sick as this baby girl, so all of us can very easily relate.

God permits evil. In the strong language of St. Paul, a man who was no stranger to hardship, "He that spared not even His Own Son; but delivered Him up for us all." (Romans 8:32) Our Lord told Judas, "This is your hour." (LK 22:53). Evil has its hour. But God has His day.

Some of the evil in the world is inseparable from human freedom. For those who say, "Lord, this is no way to run a railroad," the cost of destroying the world's evil would be the destruction of human freedom.

Evil as a result of human freedom, of free will, is easy to explain. My three year old nephew was killed in car accident on Route 206. The accident was caused by the driver of the cement truck that bent over to pick a magazine off the floor of

the cab, and when he returned to the wheel, he was on top my family's car, stopped to make a left hand turn into a parking lot.

If the Coronavirus was transmitted to workers in a Chinese laboratory or a wet market that was playing loose with safety protocols. Or worse if the conspiracy theories are true which say the spread of this virus was no accident. If that's true, this pandemic is the result of free will, evil as evil can be.

I don't think any of us would want to pay the price of human freedom to destroy the world's evil. And we must believe that God would never permit evil unless He could draw some good from it. God can draw good out of evil because, while the choice of doing evil is ours, God is so powerful that He can use our choice to do evil to bring about a much greater good.

In the Old Testament the brothers of Joseph were free to throw him in a well, but from that point on, Joseph was in God's hands. And rightly did Joseph say to his brothers. "You intended it for evil, but God for good." (GEN 50:20)

At the crucifixion:

- ✓ the executioners were free to nail Our Lord to the cross,
- ✓ Judas was free to betray,

✓ And the judges were free to misjudge, but they could not prevent the effect of their evil deeds, namely, the Crucifixion, to be used by God for a greater good, namely, the means of our redemption.

Peter spoke of the Crucifixion as an evil deed known and permitted by God. We read in the Acts of the Apostles:

You who are Israelites, hear these words. Jesus the Nazorean was a man commended to you by God with mighty deeds, wonders and signs, which God worked through Him in your midst, as you yourselves know. This man, delivered up by the set plan and foreknowledge of God, you killed, using lawless men to crucify Him. But God raised Him up. Releasing Him from the throes of death, because it was impossible for Him to be held by it.”  
(2:22-24)

The evil which God permits must not be judged by its immediate effects, but rather by its ultimate effects. When you watch a movie, you don't turn it off because you see a good man suffering in the first scene. You give the director credit for a plot.

Martha could not understand why Lazarus should die, particularly because Lazarus was the friend of Our Lord. But Our Lord told her it was in order that God's power might be revealed in his resurrection from the dead. Because eventually Lazarus died again.

We must do everything within our power to fulfill God's will as it is revealed to us by the Church, God's Commandments and the duties that flow from our state in life. But everything that is outside of our power, we must hand it over and leave it at the foot of the Cross, surrendering it to His Holy Will. Notice the distinction between "within our power" and "outside our power." There is no wisdom in the fatalist who says when our time comes, our time comes. There is much more wisdom in the believer who says, "You run up against a brick wall every now and again. If God wants you to go through the wall, it is up to God to make the hole."

I started this homily speaking about sickness, which God could prevent, no question. If the sickness is not being prevented, there must be a superior reason. Every moment comes to us pregnant with a divine purpose; time being so precious that God deals it out second by second. We are fond

of saying, "In God's time." Perhaps one of the reasons why so few Americans like Rome is because it was not built in a day. Evil things are done quickly. As Jesus instructed Judas, "What you are about to do, do quickly." (JN 13:27)

Fulton Sheen said, "You will never be happy if your happiness depends on getting solely what you want. Change the focus. Get a new center. Will what God wills, and your joy no man can take from you."

I'm praying for a cure for our little baby girl. I am. And if I were running the railroad, I'd gladly switch the rails and transfer her leukemia on to me. Who wouldn't? But I'm not running the railroad.

I will speak from my experience. You all know I suffered from depression. It was the heaviest cross I ever carried. It's a cross you cannot think your way out of or through, because when you are depressed, you cannot think. Your thoughts do not connect. It's awful and it's dark. And those who suffer from depression know what I'm describing. I wanted and I prayed for an immediate cure. I went to more healing Masses hoping the priest would lay hands and cure me. I blest and drank holy water, which didn't hurt, but it didn't help. Long story short, in

1996, right here in Medford, I met Maria Esperanza, a Venezuelan mystic who received apparitions. Her cause for beatification and canonization has been opened by Bishop Bootkoski of Metuchen. Again, I was hoping for an immediate cure. She did not pray with me. She did not lay hands on me. She only spoke to my sister Joanne and said, "his healing has begun." I didn't feel my healing had begun, but I knew I had to muster the strength to wait, and wait I did. Eventually, my depression did end. By the time it ended, I was on my second psychiatrist and my third anti-depressant, but I was still, and am still on the same God, who is running the railroad.

Whatever cure you are praying for: physical, spiritual, financial, whatever the cure, wait on the Lord.

One last point. While depression has been my heaviest cross, it hasn't been my only cross. And whenever I'm carrying a cross, I am never carrying it alone. It's the Lord and I like it was the Lord and Simon of Cyrene. I don't mean to sound pious. I just mean to speak from the heart. And I must say that when I'm carrying a cross, it is then that I feel closest to Him.