

13B 2021 SML
MK 5:21-43

Just about every Sunday this year, the gospel is taken from Mark. So it is critical to understand Mark's reason for writing his gospel. One could summarize Mark's gospel this way: we can best understand Our Lord from His suffering on the cross and therefore, we can best understand our mission when we share in His suffering on the cross as well. And much like Jairus with a daughter at the point of death, and the woman who had bled for a dozen years, it is not hard to name a cross.

The Apostles in last Sunday's gospel of the Stilling of the Storm prototype the fair-weather friends - those who are faithful when the going is just fine. But when the going gets tough:

- ✓ the storms of life,
- ✓ the winds of unpredictability,
- ✓ setback,
- ✓ crisis,
- ✓ tragedy,

the Apostles take the words right out of our mouths: "Lord, don't you care that we are perishing?"

Mark's lesson on faith continues this Sunday, and by the way this morning's gospel is written, the lesson at hand is an important one. One way that Mark used to accent an important topic is a device scripture scholars term "Marcan intercalation." When Mark surrounds one story of his gospel with another story, the reader knows to pay attention. A case in point is this morning's gospel.

The gospel began with the story of the daughter of Jairus, then switches to the woman with the 12 year hemorrhage, and then switches back to the daughter of Jairus. Framing one story around another is an intercalation, and whenever there is an intercalation, there is something to be learned, and Mark's something is suffering. Why do we suffer?

Mark presented two extremely different stories where faith in Our Blessed Lord helped the suffering faithful to carry their cross:

Jairus, a well known synagogue official
An unnamed woman

Jairus, a rich official
A woman who had exhausted her savings

A man radiating fortitude
A woman emanating fear of the Lord

A synagogue official, hardly a Christian
A townswoman, most probably a follower

An open request to cure his daughter's critical condition
An embarrassed gesture in an effort to be healed of a 12
year hemorrhage

A miracle before no one but the girl's parents, Peter,
James and John;
A miracle before a crowd of faith filled believers

Our Blessed Lord cured the girl in the coma
And He healed the hemorrhaging woman

So why do we suffer? It's one of the hardest facts of life to face or understand. And the ubiquity of suffering has long been considered an argument against the existence of a God who is good. To say that God "permits" suffering seems to make God either incompetent or sadistic. Last Sunday's question asked by the Apostles was perfect: "Lord, do you not care that we are perishing?"

Over the centuries, human beings have coped with suffering in various ways:

- ✓ from stoic resignation,
- ✓ to angry protest,
- ✓ to numb silence,

- ✓ to fervent prayer,
- ✓ to quests for the miraculous.

A generation ago, the simple answer was “Offer it up!” You either offered it up for the poor souls in purgatory or you offered it up in reparation for your own sins. There was and is a lot of wisdom in that simple answer to “offer it up.”

St. John Paul II addressed this in his apostolic letter, *Salvifici Doloris* or “Salvific Suffering.” In this letter, John Paul said the answer to the question, “Why do we suffer?” takes us right to the heart of the Catholic Church, who is Our Blessed Lord.

John Paul said that Our Blessed Lord is a redeemer who showed His victorious strength by displaying His weakness. God’s answer to suffering is not to:

- avoid it,
- deny it,
- or blame it on human error.

To do any of these things would be to miss something, or better yet, as John Paul says, to miss Someone: and that Someone is Jesus Christ. God’s answer to suffering is to embrace it – to embrace it as His Son did, Who redeemed

suffering by suffering. And to understand that, none of us needs to go any further than our own experience.

You think back to the time when you suffered the most. For me, it was my depression. For my brother, it was the death of his son. The love that surrounded our family during that horrible time my nephew was killed was overwhelming. During the days that my family kept vigil at Geoff's bedside, between the 12 hour tests to see if Geoff's brain activity changed, each one of us said it at one time or another. "I would switch places with Geoff in a minute." Any one of us would gladly have taken Geoff's place in the car, in the hospital bed. That's embracing suffering.

Nobody stayed away. There were at least 500 people at his viewing and Funeral Mass. Our extended family and friends walked with us the entire time. They embraced our suffering.

And whose example are we following? We're following the example of Our Blessed Lord, Who:

- ✓ took our sins,
- ✓ embraced our suffering
- ✓ and went straight to the cross

with all of it. Because when we are suffering, whether it is:

- ✓ mental or physical,

- ✓ whether in union with Our Lord in His agony in the garden,
- ✓ being flogged and spat upon,
- ✓ or in union with Him as He is actually carrying the burden,
- ✓ going up the hill of Calvary

there is nothing that brings us closer to Our Blessed Lord, and through Him, to the Father, than actually suffering with Him.

And next to Christ, who is the model disciple? Our Blessed Mother. If Mary's first yes to God's invitation at the Annunciation was made in joy, then Mary's second yes was given in silence, when she stood in mute sorrow on Calvary. My family suffered at the foot of Geoff's hospital bed as Mary suffered at the foot of the Cross. And as my family and Mary would have traded places in a minute, perhaps the answer to "Why do we suffer?" is so we can share in the sufferings of Christ, so we can suffer with another.

Nothing draws a person outside of themselves more than when they see someone suffer. Suffering draws out of us self-giving and unselfish love. Suffering makes us love more.

Philosopher Peter Kreeft said it best:

Suffering, in light of the cross of Jesus Christ, becomes the base note “in a harmony whose high notes are lost in heaven.”¹

¹ George Weigel, The Truth of Catholicism, p. 125.