

Why? Why me? Why Lord? How could you let this happen?

Since the beginning of time people have wrestled with the notion of how God could allow suffering in this world; how God could let bad things happen to good people. In our first reading, Habakkuk lamented to God: Why do you set injustice before me, why do you allow tyranny? Outrage and violence, this is all I see.

In the world today there are so many people crying out for justice, mercy, or peace. God hears their cries, but the question is whether or not we hear them and are moved to action. If we listen with ears of faith and see with eyes of love, we would be moved by the cries of:

- people facing famine or devastation
- migrants on our border
- the mother of a murdered child in Detroit or Berkley
- children in Syria living in a warzone
- those who've lost a loved one
- those facing with a terminal or chronic illness
- those who struggle to pay the bills

The list can go on and on. Pain and suffering are real, we've all experienced it and will experience it in the future. It is an unfortunate reality of life.

While there are not good answers for why people suffer, how we react to suffering, how we, modern day disciples, hear and are moved by the suffering of others is important. Jesus left us an example, but it is hard to always do as Jesus would do. So that is why the disciples in today's gospel reading asked Jesus to increase their faith, to help them be more faithful, more loving, and more forgiving.

In my limited experience of dealing with the dying, most facing death eventually find peace. A great part of that peace comes from the presence of those who love them, from the loving hands of others. The experience of being loved, of being respected, of being treated as important, is comforting and reassuring. The faith that is held deep in the heart, whether they were regular church-goers or not, provides great comfort and reassurance that God is with them. I've witnessed the dying and their loved ones move from "why me" to "yes, Lord, I am ready."

In today's gospel reading, the disciples ask Jesus to increase their faith. Why? What prompted them to ask for a greater faith? The radical message of love from Jesus was a challenge, as it can be for us. Just before today's gospel passage, Jesus spoke about forgiveness within and among his followers. He told his disciples to forgive whoever hurt them, however they hurt them, even if they kept on offending over and over. Now that is not easy to do, in fact, it is counter to our human instincts. Radical love and forgiveness is not something that comes easily to us, and the disciples realized they needed God's help.

With his answer, Jesus made it clear that it is not the amount of faith at issue, but rather it was the quality of their faith. He said: "If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea', and it would obey you." In other words, if we have faith in God's love and compassion, we can move from resistance to acceptance.

Our gospel reading ended with a confusing story about a servant and his master that, on the surface, is hard to connect with faith. Perhaps Jesus was referring to our task on earth to serve, to never tire of

toiling in the field of healing, forgiving, and loving. We can never tire of being the hands and feet of Christ to the world around us.

I want to close today by comparing the servant and the master in today's gospel with Jesus. At his final meal, Jesus was not served, but rather he knelt and washed the feet of his disciples. Jesus told his disciples to pay attention to what he was doing as this is what he expects from us – loving service. Notice there is nothing about deserving in his initiative or in our response, nothing about merit, nothing about punishment or reward. It was simply love; simply joy.

Not long after that meal, Jesus was put to death and then raised from the dead. Both before and after his death, Jesus had insisted on forgiving everyone who had colluded in his crucifixion. His first words to his disciples after the resurrection were, peace be with you. He had come back, not as triumphant, victorious Lord, but largely unnoticed by all but his closest friends, still bearing his wounds. How amazing that God would appear in such a humble and vulnerable state to teach us how we too should live.

My friends, let the Eucharist we are about to share fill us with love and let it nourish our faith so that we can continue to toil in the field, to be a voice for the voiceless, to be the hands and feet of Christ. We do not need more faith, we need to deepen the quality of our faith so that we can be the healers, and teachers, and lovers the world so desperately needs. We have work to do, let us never grow weary.

Can I hear an amen?