

# **From the Homily Library of Fr. Callistus Iyorembor**

## **Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year B – February 7, 2021**

My dear friends, this weekend's readings deal with one of the most difficult theological questions in the history of world. I am talking about the problem of pain.

- ✓ Why should God - who is all good and all powerful - allow for so much pain, so much suffering?
- ✓ Why would an all-powerful and all-loving God allow His people to suffer so much?

### **John Stewart Miller**

You may have heard of John Stewart Miller, the famous atheist. John Stewart Miller argued that if God is all powerful, all knowing and all good, then there will be no evil. Because God would know about it. He is omniscient. He could do something about it. He is omnipotent. He would want do something about it. He is omni-benevolent. So, if God is all three of these, then there will be no evil, no pain, no suffering. John Stewart concluded that God therefore does not exist. Notice almost everybody feels the power of his argument.

The entire Bible wrestles with this theological question - but most especially in the book of Job. Most of us know the story of Job very well. God allows the devil to inflict all kinds of suffering on poor Job. In one fell swoop, Job loses his wife, his children, his home, his livelihood and his health. He is visited with every kind of human suffering. What we hear in today's first reading is his lament.

Listen to the lines of the first reading again:

*“Do not human beings have a hard service on earth, and are not their days like the days of a laborer? Like a slave who longs for the shadow and like laborers who look for their wages, so I am allotted months of emptiness, and nights of misery are apportioned to me. ”*

There are many listening to me right now who identify deeply with Job. Your life - to some degree and at some point - has felt like Job. You may have experienced psychological and physical pain, anxiety, misery, depression, loss of those you love or even a combination of all these.

Listen to how revocably Job presents his suffering:

*“When I lie down, I say, ‘When shall I rise?’ But the night is long, and I am full of tossing until dawn. My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle and come to their end without hope. Remember that my life is a breath; my eye will never again see good.”*

I don’t know about you but, for me, there is something uniquely troubling about lying awake at night. Unable to sleep. Beset by all worries. You can’t sleep. The night drags on. Job is describing his situation.

The church this weekend juxtaposes this first<sup>t</sup> reading from the Book of Job with the gospel story. We hear that a *whole army of Jobs* comes to Jesus. What are the names of these Jobs?

Listen to the gospel passage:

*“When it was evening, after sunset they brought to Jesus all who were ill or possessed by demons. He cured many who were afflicted by diseases and drove out many demons.”*

Stay with this image. Jesus is in the middle, surrounded by the lame, blind, crippled and mentally ill - all coming to Christ. He is surrounded by human suffering.

Jesus is in solidarity with these *whole army of Jobs*, these suffering people by reaching out to them and healing them.

When we come to Mass and enter into the mystery of the Mass we, too, experience the healing power of God. We receive supernatural grace. Our sins are forgiven. We experience the healing power of God. Sometimes He heals us physically; sometimes he heals us psychologically.

Today we are called to be imitators of Christ. He is in solidarity with those who suffer and can help to ease the suffering of others. We, too, can be in solidarity with people who are experiencing any kind of pain. Today we can let Christ Himself act through us to ease the pain, suffering and loneliness of others. We can care for people in need and comfort those who are anxious or heartbroken.

The Church gives us one way to do that: The Seven Corporal Works of Mercy.