

12th Sunday (B)

Our readings show us that God is in the storm. In the middle of all the trials, difficulties, all the terrible no good very bad things we can find ourselves in, there is God. In the fogginess of doubt and questioning God is in that too.

The first reading comes from the Book of Job. This is the Old Testament that asks the perennial questions, “Why do people suffer?” And, “Why do bad things happen to good people?” These are questions that mankind has always asked and will continue to ask. It can be hard to square suffering with a benevolent God. How can a good God allow suffering?

The particular part of the book that our reading comes from gives us God’s response. To summarize, God is basically saying, “My ways are not your ways.” God’s wisdom is infinite, as ours is finite. We can often fail to see the end purpose of suffering. We have our peep hole through which we see things, while God has the whole picture in view.

Regardless if we can understand why God is still there in the middle of it. We are told that God addressed Job “out of the storm.” In the middle of it all God was there. Even if He didn’t tell Job anything, it didn’t mean that God didn’t know or didn’t care. Why is God with us in the storms? Because He knows what it feels like to suffer, to doubt, as Jesus Christ experienced all of the suffering that we can go through.

In the Gospel we see God, in the person of Jesus, present in the middle of a storm. Jesus was with the disciples as they were crossing the Sea of Galilee. A storm came through in the middle of the night. We can presume the disciples thought that they were going to die that night, as water was beginning to come over the sides of the boat. In the middle of this scene what is Jesus doing? He's asleep on a cushion.

In the middle of that storm Jesus was there. In the middle of our storms Jesus is also there. It might not seem like He is. We might not think that He is listening to our cries, but He is there. He never said that He will take away our pain and suffering. He never said that it is easy to be His disciple. He does tell us that He will be next to us, that He will never abandon us. There can be comfort there, knowing that He is there in the middle of it, even though it might now always seem like He is.

St. Paul gives us a response on our end. He tells us to live for Jesus, and not for ourselves. We can be tempted to pity ourselves, to have a "woe is me" attitude. This and similar reactions are really selfish and self-referential. St. Paul is encouraging us to selflessness and remaining open. Closing ourselves off does us no good. Being open helps us to be outward with our perspective, which can eventually lead us to Christ. He should be our first concern, even in the middle of the Cross.

It is possible to remain focused on Christ in our suffering, using it for the good of others. Uniting our suffering to that of Jesus on the Cross can bring about transformation. It brings meaning and purpose when in our suffering we go to Him who was only concerned about us in His suffering. This is the Christian response to suffering. This is the Christian reaction when the storm comes.

St. Paul mentions the transformation that does eventually come. “The old order has passed away; behold, new things come” is what He tells us. The words of Jesus in the Book of Revelation is more explicitly connected with suffering. I’ll end with His words, “And I heard a great voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away.’ And he who sat upon the throne said, ‘Behold, I make all things new’” (Rev. 21:3-5)