

5th Sunday of Ordinary Time B

We all know why bad things happen to bad people... they deserve it! We are confused, however, when bad things happen to good people... they don't deserve it! I have known too many people over the years who have given up their faith when bad things happen to good people.

The Old Testament story of Job is meant to address this confusion. If you remember Job's story he lived the good life – wealth, great family, many friends... life was very, very good. Then things suddenly changed – he lost his wealth, his family all experienced tragic deaths and his friends became his critics.

Since his friends believed that bad things happen to bad people they told Job that he must have done something bad. Job knew that this was not true. He knew that he had always been a good person. But his friends didn't believe him.

In the reading today we hear some of Job's lamenting. He says among other things that he will not "see happiness again." He who once had everything, now finds himself poor, sick and abandoned. His crisis seems to make him realize, perhaps for the first time ... that bad things do happen to good people. He faces a crisis of faith: is it possible to praise God from the depths of misery?

His praise comes in the form of laments and complaints. When God does answer him Job realizes that he is not God, that he cannot comprehend God's ways. He reasons that since he accepts good things from God shouldn't he also accept bad things?

In the gospel reading we find Jesus curing Peter's mother-in-law of her fever. We find him curing those who were sick with various diseases. We find him driving out many demons.

As Jesus responded to the suffering of his time when bad things happened to good people so we too need to respond to the suffering of our time. In other words, when we see suffering, we need to do something about it:

- St. Theresa of Calcutta picked the dying off the streets of that city and took care of them until they died.
- Dorothy Day began the Catholic Worker movement providing food and housing for the homeless.
- Many members of this parish work in the health care profession.
- Rabbi Harold Kushner wrote a book.

His book is entitled “When Bad Things Happen Good People.” The book was about his son who died at the age of twelve of a rare disease. Like many of us when a young person dies he asked the question why. And so he found himself asking why did my son die at such a young age? He discovered, however, that there is really no answer to that question. In the midst of reflecting on his loss he discovered that the question is not “why” but “what.” What am I going to do with my life now that my loved one has died? He wrote a book. I have always found his insight to be very valuable.

Can you identify with the laments and complaints of Job? Do you find that you respond in some way to some of the suffering that you encounter around you? Do you believe that the question is “what” and not “why?”