

February 4, 2024

Written by
THE
FAITHFUL
DISCIPLE

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Jb 7:1-4, 6-7 | 1 Cor 9:16-19, 22-23 | Mk 1:29-39

GROW AS A DISCIPLE | PRAY, STUDY, ENGAGE, SERVE

Why me? It could be a flat tire, a lost job or a serious illness. When inconvenient, unpleasant or even downright horrible things happen, it is understandable to wonder why God allows it. I know that is what goes through my head in extreme adversity. God can do all things, so why wouldn't he change "this thing" for me? In the Gospel, we see Jesus curing Simon Peter's mother-in-law of her illness, but many of us don't have our prayers answered like that. Instead, we may relate more to Job in today's first reading when he says life is a "drudgery" and he "shall not see happiness again." The reality is that God's ways are not our ways, so we can't know why some people endure hardship while others receive miracles. But we can change how we respond to those hardships when they arrive. Just as this passage from Job is understood better within the context of the whole book, discrete events in our lives are part of something larger than ourselves. Praying with Scripture, including reading more of Job, can help us understand how God is molding, refining, and yes - always loving us.

GO EVANGELIZE

PRAYER, INVITATION, WITNESS, ACCOMPANIMENT

When we are tempted to feel like Job is a good time to embrace the age-old practice of "offering it [suffering] up." As a child, my parents explained that offering it up meant I was telling God I would happily suffer in exchange for it helping someone else. What does this really mean? Everything stems from our being united to Christ in our baptism and being participants in his priestly, prophetic and royal office. We offer ourselves, our whole being, including our worship, praise, joy, gratitude, bodies and even sufferings to God as sacrifice. So, to "offer it [suffering] up" is a powerful way of taking a bad situation and allowing it to be used for something good; to give our inconvenience, pain and grief to the Lord and ask him to unite it to Christ's suffering for the good of others. It is a redemptive act, a form of love-in-action. St. Paul is a great example of someone who suffered gladly, and in today's second reading he shares that "to the weak [he] became weak, to win over the weak."

PRAY Offering up our sufferings and difficulties is a way to participate in the redemptive work of Christ. It is a simple way to pray and can keep our focus on God throughout the day. There isn't any one specific prayer for doing this. Instead, when something unpleasant or painful happens, take a moment to acknowledge it and give it to the Lord. It can be as simple as saying, "Lord, I am happy to endure this for the benefit of others." You may want to insert a specific intention or offer it for the souls in purgatory. It's not always easy - especially when your suffering is great - but give it a try this week.