

Homily for the 6th Sunday of Lent, Cycle A

"Could not the one who opened the eyes of the blind man have done something so that this man would not have died?"

Whenever tragic events occur, from the death of a single loved one to hundreds of thousands of lost lives such as those taken by the recent Asian tsunami, there are always those who ask questions similar to the one asked in today's gospel. I want to explore two of these common questions. The first is this: "What kind of a God would allow such things"? And to be honest, I think it is a fair question to ask.

In fact, if we were to place God on trial in a human court on the charge of being unrighteous, by our limited standards, He might be found guilty, were it not for three little words found in today's gospel reading.

And Jesus wept.

This, my brothers and sisters just might be the shortest sentence in all of Holy Scripture. Yet it speaks volumes to us concerning the compassion, mercy and love of Jesus. It shows the deep connection that He who is the God-Man has with you and with me. It shows the depths of His humility as He who is undiminished divinity, takes on our humanity,

It shows his standing in SOLIDARITY with us.

It is because of this solidarity, that we can truly say we have a just and compassionate savior. Jesus, creator of the universe, enters into the lives of His creation, as one of us in ALL THINGS but sin.

And Jesus wept. He wept then, and perhaps He weeps even today.

He weeps today over the deaths, brought on by mankind's hands, from wars to the genocide that takes place daily in the wombs of women, who have been living in a world that has lied to them, in fact, lies to all of us about the value and dignity of human life. He weeps for the souls that do not know Him. He weeps for you and he weeps for me, because we say we know Him, yet we keep living out the same patterns of sin we have been struggling with for what seems like forever.

This brings us to the second question: If God is in control, why does God allow so much suffering? Notice, please, that I say He allows such things to occur, He **does not** cause them.

I think the answer to that also lies in today's Gospel. Jesus does more than just weep. He acts. And sometimes He acts by appearing to not act at all. For example:

Mary and Martha made a simple and faith filled request of Jesus in these words: "Master, the one you love is ill." The beauty and simplicity of this prayer recalls another like it, when His Mother said at Cana "They have no wine".

But in today's Gospel, Jesus does not act immediately to save Lazarus from death. He certainly could have, after all He healed the Centurion's slave from a distance. Yet we see Him allowing Lazarus to die and be placed in a tomb. In fact He waits two days before "doing" anything. Again, from our limited human perspective, Jesus *appears* to be unconcerned.

It is in that perception of being unconcerned that our Savior teaches us something very beautiful and important about Himself. And I think this is it: God's time is not our time; it is the timing of perfect love.

We love imperfectly, but not Jesus. By the very fact of His being, Jesus IS LOVE! And love himself can never cease to love, completely and perfectly. And it is in the perfection of His love that He sometimes acts in love, by appearing to us to be doing nothing!

OK, that was a little confusing. Let's try that again. We have all experienced prayers that we think have not been answered, right? Maybe we didn't get that promotion we wanted, or perhaps we struggle with infertility. Maybe we have lost a loved one in their prime of life due to an accident or illness. Anyway, the point is God seems silent to **all of us** at some time in our lives, but remember, love Himself MUST love, by his very nature. The very source of love is our Triune God, therefore perfect love MUST love for the sake doing the will of God. Why? One reason is so that **we** might **see** the glory of God!

And when we see God's glory, we will act accordingly, by making His presence known in our deeds that are done solely for the love of another.

Now I admit that I have not always been all that patient or understanding when God is working in my life this way, but Love Himself is not deterred by my resistance. He is patient with me, He is patient with us. He has to be, because we have a very difficult lesson to learn.

We have to learn to **die!**

Lazarus had to die so that the glory of God might be seen. He had to die to himself to arise to something better. Not much is said about the life of Lazarus after he is brought back from death, but I am sure of one thing, his life could never be the same as it was before that day when Jesus shouted "Lazarus, come out" and he was released from his burial cloths.

And this brings us to how we observe Lent. To a child, Lent is about giving up candy, or television, or video games. That is a normal and acceptable understanding for a child. However, we too, often have a child's view of Lent. We focus on the sacrifice for the sake of the sacrifice itself. Our focus is removed from the means through which our Lord showed the depth of His Love, the Cross. For without the cross, there is no resurrection, there is no Easter. No Easter, no Church. No Church, No Sacraments. No Sacraments, No Eucharist. No Eucharist, no hope.

That is why you see a crucifix hanging here, instead of an empty cross. We cannot forget the sacrifice. In perfect love, Love Himself embraced the cross. Jesus had to die, so that we might live!

The Journey of Lent is a journey to our own Calvary. It is a journey of our own nailing to the cross, and our own death to the sin in our lives. It is the journey in which we name our sins that bind us, that hold us hostage in our grave. It is the journey of Christ in us toward the resurrection to new life, promised not **only** for the future, at the end of time, but for today, where we, like Lazarus can no longer be the same as we were before our rising to new life in Jesus.

(God promises us, in today's first reading to open our graves, to have us rise from them, and to give us His Spirit so that we might live. That reading closes with an astounding affirmation of this gift of salvation:

"I have promised and I WILL DO IT, says the Lord.)