

## Homily for the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

Once upon a time during the Super Bowl, there was another football game of note – one between the big animals and the little animals. The big animals were of course crushing the little animals, and at half-time the coach made a passionate speech to rally the little animals. Well, at the start of the second half the big animals had the ball. The first play, the elephant got stopped with no gain. The second play, the rhino was stopped with no gain. On third down, the hippo was downed for a 5 yard loss. The defense huddled around the coach and he asked excitedly, "Who stopped the elephant?" "I did," said the centipede. "Who stopped the rhino?" "Uh, that was me too," said the centipede. "And how about the hippo? Who hit him for the 5 yard loss?" "Well, that was me as well," said the centipede. "So where were you during the first half?" demanded the coach. "Well," said the centipede, "I was having my ankles taped."

Ok, while you're recovering from that bad joke, I'm going to move on to a lighter topic – sin and suffering. Why this topic? Well, it's one we all experience, and an important one as Job shows us in the first reading today. You might know the story of Job from the Old Testament. He was a successful man by all accounts – with a good job, a great family, and real friends to boot. But one day, all that came crashing down: his children were killed in a tragic accident, thieves came and stole all his livestock, and he even became infested with ulcerous boils. And yet, despite all that, from somewhere deep within Job was able to utter, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!"

Now, we might hear that – “blessed be the name of the Lord” – and think, “Job, you’re crazy. What do you mean blessed be the name of the Lord!?! After everything that happened to you?” Job’s wife even told him to just give up on God, because in her estimation apparently God had given up on him.

Why would God allow such evil to touch Job’s life? I mean he was a righteous man – honest, good, faithful. But, you know, sin is such a mystery that is beyond us. For example, innocent people suffer at the result of other people’s sins, and malicious people get away with their sin at the expense of the innocent. It doesn’t make sense. The only thing that makes sense is to say that God has given us free will – our ability to choose --- because, if we didn’t have free will, how could we really choose to love God or another? But, and this is a big but, because we all have free will, at all, means that we can choose against God – we can choose sin.

But, why doesn’t God at least stop the evil effects of sin from harming the innocent. I mean, I can see letting the guilty get their punishment, but the innocent? No simple answers to explain this question away, at least any that would really satisfy.

The good news however, is that suffering does not have to be in vain. What do I mean? Well, for example, I hate giving blood, and yet because I know that getting a needle poked around in my arm will help, I sometimes do it anyway. And what about the Passion of Jesus? Think about the people that walked by Him as He hung upon the cross, maybe thinking to themselves, “What a shame! He could have actually been something. He must have really done something evil to wind up like that.” And yet, we know those words couldn’t be further from the truth.

Rather, what Jesus teaches us about suffering is that it can ultimately be something God uses for the good. Not that God wills sin or suffering – He doesn’t. But, God, who respects our free will, can somehow even take the worst and allow some good to come from it – for us personally or even for the world.

Have you ever had a really bad day – maybe someone yelled at you, all day? Or, perhaps you’ve just gone through a break-up? We all know that feeling of anguish. Well, we can either allow those painful emotions to just consume us, or we can do something different: we can turn to God and just cry out. This is what Job did in our first reading today. He cried out to God from where he was in his painful life. He says: Lord, “Remember that my life is like the wind; I shall not see happiness again.” We’ve all probably felt a similar way before.

But in crying out to God, God truly heard him. And although Job's suffering continued on for quite some time, Job's faith was actually strengthened in God. You see, Job knew no amount of reasoning would explain his suffering away. And so he could either let it eat him alive, or he could turn to the only one who could console him; the only one, who in the end, would bring him through it all; the only one who could ever bring him safely to eternal rest at the end of his life.

My brothers and sisters, this is what we can do when it comes to suffering in our lives too. We can learn that God will never abandon us and He is ultimately in control, no matter what sinful choices we might make, or what experiences of suffering we might endure. And He will always be our comfort until we can be at peace again. God bless you.