

Feb 8, 5th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Job 7:1-:4, :6-:7

We have a rare opportunity today. Our 1st reading this today is from the book of Job, one of the most important books of the bible, but one that is rarely read from at Sunday mass. This gives us a unique chance to look at something which is of extreme value.

As we look at what Job has to say it can seem strange that I'm referring to this as an opportunity, as something we should be glad about. Job refers to life as drudgery (Job 7:1), to himself as a slave (7:2), he says that he is in misery (7:3), that he is without hope (7:6), and he expresses his belief that he will not see happiness again (7:7).

As it ends up he was wrong about this, the great suffering and loss he faced was brought to an end in the concluding chapters of this book, but the tale of Job's suffering is something that we have to encounter or our understanding of God will be dangerously inadequate.

In the book of Job the title character loses his children, his servants are killed, and his property is stolen and destroyed. (Job 1:13-:22) Then he was cursed with an illness that caused painful and disfiguring sores. (Job 2:7-:8) He was left with a wife (Job 2:9-:10) and friends (Job 3-28) whose advice to him was foolish enough that, putting aside the issue of their well being, Job might have been better off if they had been taken from him too.

The bulk of this book is verse after verse, chapter after chapter, of suffering and incomprehension.

When God does appear in the closing chapters of the book (Job 38-42) he does not so much offer Job an explanation of what happened, as point out that Job and those

around him do not have the wisdom to understand what has occurred. What this book ends up doing is not so much explaining Job's suffering, or suffering in general, but revealing our obligation to accept the will of God despite our incomprehension.

The book of Job makes it clear that in worldly terms nothing is promised to us. God has not given us a promise that things will go well for us. He has not promised us that we will know ease, comfort, or peace. Our happiness is not guaranteed.

Not a single one of us is sinless or perfect, but this book shows us that we can be as faithful and as holy as it is possible to be in this world and still be, as Job was; alone, persecuted, trapped in poverty, crushed by illness, and lacking in understanding as to why this is happening.

God hasn't guaranteed us anything, when it comes to what our experience in this world will be like.

In God's eyes our real problems are our separation from him and our need to have our sins forgiven. Through the cross of Christ these problems have been taken care of.

God has offered every single one of us his mercy and his forgiveness, but apart from that, nothing at all is guaranteed to any of us.

If our faith is dependent on God providing for us when it comes to financial stability, or on him ensuring that we're loved and supported by the people around us, if there is anything at all that we think God must provide for us apart from the opportunity to receive the gift of salvation and redemption, then our faith is false.

It's not real.

It's not biblical faith.

Now of course the reality is that most of us will have it a lot easier than Job. Real faith does not depend on anything being given to us apart from God himself, but most of us have been given secondary gifts and comforts by God. These are good things, and we should enjoy them and be grateful for them, but we have to see them in a proper light.

God is essential, and there is nothing and no one else, of which this can be said. If we end up being ultimately dependent on anything else; our health, our peace of mind, possessions, wealth, friends, family, then these things have torn us away from what we really need.

I think maybe we can figure out why the Book of Job is rarely used as one of the scripture passages for Sunday mass. It's a pretty rare person who's ready to deal with a text this blunt with any sort of frequency.

But we must, at least occasionally, be reminded of what God wishes to teach us through this text.

We need God, we need his mercy, and we need his forgiveness.

And there is nothing else in this world that can truly be described as a need.

What we need, has been promised to us.

What we don't need, has not been.