

28. September 2022

## How to deal with suffering

Job 9:1-12,14-16

*Job answered his friends: "Indeed, I know it is as you say: how could anyone claim to be upright before God? Anyone trying to argue matters with him, could not give him one answer in a thousand. Among the wisest and the hardiest, who then can successfully defy him? He moves the mountains, though they do not know it; he throws them down when he is angry. He shakes the earth, and moves it from its place, making all its pillars tremble. The sun, at his command, forbears to rise, and on the stars he sets a seal. He and no other has stretched out the heavens and trampled on the back of the Sea. He has made the Bear and Orion, the Pleiades and the Mansions of the South. The works he does are great and unfathomable, and his marvels cannot be counted. If he passes me, I do not see him; he slips by, imperceptible to me. If he snatches his prey, who is going to stop him or dare to ask, 'What are you doing?' And here am I, proposing to defend myself and select my arguments against him! Even if I am upright, what point is there in answering him? I can only plead for mercy with my judge! And if he deigned to answer my citation, I cannot believe he would listen to what I said."*

Today's reading is preceded by the lamentations of Job because of the misfortune that befell him. In addition, we find in the previous chapters various pieces of advice and positions that he received to interpret what happened to him.

Perhaps we can understand the words that Job utters in today's reading as an attempt to place himself in the proper relationship with God in the midst of his painful situation. Indeed, suffering of such intensity must first be assimilated inwardly. When we go through great tribulations, it can happen that we rebel and that we have to struggle inwardly - perhaps for a long time - until we overcome that rebellion.

In today's reading, Job underlines the greatness and immovable sovereignty of God, before whom all rebellion is useless and unjustified. In the face of this inviolable greatness of God, even the suffering creature must be silent and accept his situation. The Wisdom of the Lord is so vast that any attempt to argue with the Lord seems pointless. This is what Job's words help us understand.

This attitude could easily be misinterpreted as a kind of surrender to the Omnipotence of God, which leads to a kind of fatalism. However, such an attitude would not be liberating, nor would it be a vision of the reality to which one should gladly submit; it would resemble an attitude of surrender that feels helpless and at the mercy of a superior force before which nothing can be done...

This is certainly not the most fruitful way to bear life's heavy crosses, and this is not the intention of today's biblical text. But how can we then deal with the hard blows of life, which threaten us existentially on a material or spiritual level, and whose meaning we cannot understand?

In the midst of suffering, we cannot fall into the fruitless attitude of closing in on ourselves. Rather, we must raise our eyes to God and enter into dialogue with Him about the suffering that has struck us. This dialogue will allow us to speak frankly with the Lord, exposing to Him our complaints about our pain and perhaps also expressing our incomprehension of why such suffering has befallen us... Dialogue with God will open our soul before Him, and He will be able to respond to us in His own way. Moreover, it may prevent the situation from becoming even heavier, with depressing feelings that darken our soul from gaining further ground. However, like Our Lord in Gethsemane (cf. Mt 26:39,42,44), we can always ask for the cross to be taken away from us.

A next step would be to activate and strengthen our trust in God. It is precisely the difficult situations that invite us to trust above feelings, for they demand an act of our spirit: "We want to trust! We trust according to the certainty of our faith! We trust because God loves us!" With such acts of trust, we assure ourselves that God has everything in His hands, that He knows our personal and family situation, that He will know how to work everything for the better... This we are to apply when we also face difficult situations in the world and in the Church, which could lead us to despair.

This trust is based on the power of His love. Even if we do not yet understand the meaning of these difficult situations that we may have to endure, God, in His love, has allowed them. This is a great act of trust, which not infrequently has to be won!

If, thanks to the dialogue with God in prayer, we have managed to come out of our self-enclosure and have made acts of trust, it will be easier for us to accept the cross that has entered our life. Of course, this acceptance can also happen "in the dark", that is, without yet understanding why God allowed it. But in the face of any tribulation that befalls us, our heart will cling to God, knowing deep down that He, in His Wisdom, will know how to make use even of this suffering. Thus, step by step, we will learn to accept it, to live with it and to grow through it.

To deepen this important topic for our life, we recommend you to listen to this conference: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dyd1b03I3Wo>