



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

5th Sunday in Ordinary Time-Year B-February 7<sup>th</sup> 2021

**Readings: Job 7: 1-4 6-7, Psalm 146, 1 Corinthians 9: 16-19 22-23**

**Mark 1: 29-39**

Sometimes people who are outside the Faith ask very profound questions.

Thus, a few weeks ago, an agnostic friend simply asked me how I would respond if the whole framework on which my life has been built, turned out to be untrue. In short, how would I react on death if the atheists were right?

The short answer is that, of course, neither they nor I would be around to be confirmed in their denial or disappointed in my hope.

The longer answer is, well, just that – longer.

Much of the modern angst about the Faith, especially in Western culture where comfort is taken as a basic human right, is rooted in the asserted incompatibility of human suffering with a good God. This, of course, is the very heart of the great poetic meditation on suffering that is the Book of Job.

There is an assumption underlying this great work of Wisdom Literature, that there is no real hope beyond the grave, merely, at best, a life of shadows. Though hints of Resurrection flicker through it, there is a solid core of ‘this world only’ hope. The good should be rewarded by a just

God. The bad punished. The Good, therefore, are marked by prosperity and comfort, the bad by suffering. (This is a trope that can be seen in much slippery TV evangelism.)

It is, of course, utter nonsense. Best summed up by a wonderful quote from dear old Oscar Wilde in his magnificent work, 'The Importance of Being Earnest'. The lovely Cecily opines: 'I don't like novels that end happily. They depress me so much.' To which Miss Prism replies: 'The good end happily and the bad unhappily. That is what Fiction means.'

If we were to assert the doctrine of 'just desserts' in this life, we would come to some pretty astonishing conclusions.

If prosperity and power were the reward of the righteous then we would applaud the sanctity of Vladimir Putin, Jinping, Bill Gates, Jeff Bezos and Elon Musk.

If suffering were the lot only of the bad, we would be left with a trail of rightly condemned martyrs, an inhumane assertion that the cancer ward was filled with children who deserved it and Jesus Himself must have been an utter 'rotter'.

So, the Book of Job wrestles with why 'bad things happen to good people'. His world destroyed. His family dead. His health in ruins, Job laments: 'Lying in bed I wonder, When will it be day?

Risen, I think how slowly evening comes. Restless, I fret til twilight falls. Swiftly as a weaver's shuttle my days have passed, leaving no hope behind. My life is but a breath. My eyes will never again see joy.'

It is a bleak and barren landscape of the soul. But in all this Job does not curse or reject God, puzzled as he is by his apparent abandonment.

The answer comes at the end of the book – though it is not an answer that we can begin to compute in simple terms. As to Moses, as to Elijah, as to the chosen three on Tabor, as to Gideon and Abram and Jacob, the Lord reveals Himself in glory. All human questioning is made redundant by the

self-revelation of God. That is, after all, what we have come to know in encounter with Christ, the Risen Lord – conqueror of suffering and death. It is why the Cross is at the heart of our Faith.

So if, as my friend asked me, I would be surprised to find out the atheist were right, the answer is in this self-revelation of God.

I would be astonished because...

Everything in my experience of the created order points to the design of a Creator and the uniqueness of man, made in His image.

Everything in my experience of Man tells me that he is not a moral neutral. He does not simply respond to evolutionary survivalist instinct but knows right and wrong and has an altruistic compassion.

Everything in my experience of suffering in human life has shown me the redemptive power of God, the transforming power of a life conformed to the Way of the Cross.

Everything in my experience of what has proved to be lasting and true and born of the well of wisdom that is beyond the depth of Man, points me to the High Road to Heaven.

Everything in my experience of failure and sin, personal and corporate, has led me back to the sacramental grace and the liberation of God's mercy.

That is not to reduce the Gospel to the delightful philosophy of Pollyanna. The Gospel Road always goes via the Calvary, always looks suffering and death squarely in the eye. A follower of Jesus is nothing if not a realist. There will be days of blackness and bleakness and the temporarily inconsolable sense of abandonment. Times when we are so close to the Cross that we can no longer see it. We gaze out from the Watchtower of Calvary from an adjacent Cross. And with Job we may cry out to the Lord in our distress.

But do we ever doubt the outcome? We need not. The evidence is long in. Man's consciousness of God is not a temporary emotional spasm or

convenient comfort blanket against the world of void and deconstruction.  
It is an embedded sign of the supervening reality of the divine in the very fabric of Mankind.

Do I expect to be disappointed post-mortem?

Amazed at what truly is, ashamed of my failures, grateful for God's mercy, astonished at the glory, cheerful to be in the company, overwhelmed by the joy, consumed by the fire of divine love, transformed from meanness into majesty – all of these and much more which is beyond the orbit of human language.

But Disappointed? Absolutely not.