

HOMILY  
5<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY ORDINARY TIME  
(DEACON RON)

In A.J. Cronin's novel, "the keys to the kingdom," one of the main characters is Fr. Chisholm, a missionary priest who has worked almost all of his life in China against overwhelming odds. There is a passage in which this good Christian missionary gives a clue to his remarkable courage and hope. He is talking to a distressed friend, a native farmer who was bitterly complaining because his garden has been completely washed out by a seasonal flood. "My plantings are all lost," the farmer complains. "We shall have to begin all over again." And father Chisholm replies quietly, "but that's life my friend; to begin again when everything is lost."

But it is hard to begin again isn't it. And so the first reading today from the book of Job is one of those readings that perhaps many these days who have experienced great losses (Jobs, homes, marriages) will find very relatable.

The book of Job is situated in the old testament next to other books which are often referred to as the wisdom literature, books such as Proverbs, Ecclesiastes. Job is not a real character but rather a combination of human experiences put into one person. One of the purposes of the book is to describe what being faithful to God can mean at times, and how at times it is very difficult to hold onto hope.

Job is pictured first as a wealthy man with a beautiful wife, children, and lots of possessions and assets. In the beginning of the book we read that God and the devil are having a discussion about Job. And devil says to God that Job's faithfulness to God is because of all the things he has and the contentment he feels in his life, but if God permits the devil to take away all of Job's possessions, his wealth, his family, that Job will not be faithful to God. And so it seems like a wager is struck between God and the devil. The devil is given permission to do as he plans but he must not kill Job. And so the story proceeds and Job loses everything. In the midst of his horror concerning all that has happened to him, Job cries out his misery, his confusion, and his anger, to God. Note that rather than abandoning all contact with God, Job instead prays. Perhaps a different type of prayer than we are use to saying but prayer no less. It is the prayer of anger, the prayers of disillusionment, the prayers of despair.. You see as bad as things get for Job, he still does not give up on God, a fact which is what the devil had said to God would happen if Job lost all of his world.

Sometimes when I meet with people for spiritual direction they will tell me how they have been reading the bible from end to end, but when they get to the book of Job they find it difficult to get through it. Some will say that just can't relate to it. And i tell them Job is one of those books of the bible, which is difficult to read and relate to unless, unless you are there. Unless in your personal life you are feeling the losses of all that you felt was dear to you, of all that you felt you had to have to exist, to be happy. It is in such times that this book speak loudly and clearly, and our understanding of what Job is

talking about is as clear as the noon day sun.

The book of Job is about staying faithful even when everything we see and touch has darkness all around it. For Job is invited to see, that while life can be very capricious at times, God is faithful even when we cannot see God or understand what God is doing. To us we want God to fix things, to restore them the way they were. God is not a fixer, God is a creator.

Strange as it may seem, also, it is through the hard times of our lives we learn things we could have never learned before when everything was going perfectly. You see as we grow up and accomplish things and acquire things we begin to see ourselves in a certain light. We become comfortable with that vision of ourselves and forget or don't realize how much that image is a fragile one, one built and tied to all that we have or have acquired. Lose it and we can feel like we have lost ourselves so to speak. We can become someone we don't know. And worse, we don't know what to do, or how to go on.

This is where faith meets the road so to speak. In a way we may have fallen flat on faces and we need someone to help us up. Our faith keeps trying to remind us that God is there, on the surface of that road, bent down and trying to lift us up. But the pain we feel because of our losses can only cry out "why did this happen?" Why weren't you looking out for me? Where do I go now I have no direction to follow? At times like these we can even experience God as being very silent. It can even feel like the silence of avoidance or abandonment. It is in those times that we have to hold on very tight to our faith. Just like Job who held onto his faith even as he prayed the prayers of anger and disillusionment to God. He didn't stop talking with God.

We know that Jesus too suffered disappointment and even brokenness in his spirit and heart. In today's gospel we have a glimmer of it. When the people come not because of his teachings, not because they are seeking the kingdom of God but because they wanted only to be healed, they wanted their "fix", to have their lives given back to them they were once. Jesus cures them, even though he knows they will get sick again. The disciples even don't get Jesus' purpose in being here. They go looking for him while he is praying so that he will come back and work more miracles- "Everybody is looking for you". But he must remind them then that it is not the miracles that count but rather what he came to teach. As one commentator on this gospel says;

"Jesus' heart was broken by people he forgave and who sinned again, by enemies who scorned him, and by friends who left him (to die alone)."

And so Jesus who is God, knows what it is to have a broken heart, a broken spirit. And that is why our faith in Jesus is so often rewarded by this sense that he is someone like us. He is someone who understands us. He is someone who can help us. Jesus speaks to us not through clouds but through others. It is the "others" who hold us, who help us until hope can return.

When we are in those places of brokenness, those places like Job experienced, like Jesus experienced, it is then that we must turn to our God, to Jesus, to help us with strength to

go on. To help us pick up the pieces of our lives and move forward, even as we mourn what we have lost.

Jesus will help us. He knows what we are experiencing, for he experienced it himself even when he was dying on the cross and cried out to go “Why have you abandoned me.” To many hearing those words it sounds as if Jesus giving up but he is not. But those lines form the opening lines of a psalm that is about hoping in God.

When all is lost and cannot be endured any more, Jesus give himself over to his Father. “Father into you hands I commend my spirit.” Just as we must give ourselves over to God. And what does God do? Well that is the story of resurrection isn’t it. Not only the resurrection of Jesus, but own resurrection from the ashes of our lives.