

Well today's Liturgy of the Word reads like a dramatic "before and after" in salvation history with our Lord Jesus Christ as the focal point. In the first and second readings today, the Church places before us two figures from Sacred Scripture—Job and St. Paul. The first reading from the Book of Job in the Old Testament may be viewed as "life *before* Christ" and the second reading from St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians in the New Testament may be viewed as "life *after* Christ."

The first reading is taken from the Old Testament Book of Job, which many scholars advise should not be interpreted as a historical work that depicts actual people or events. Rather, the Book of Job, which was probably written sometime between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, is intended to be an exquisite, dramatic literary composition that considers the problem of the suffering of the innocent. The literary character of Job could be said to represent all those in the ancient world, both Jews and Gentiles, *specifically in the centuries before Christ*, who sincerely questioned the reality of human suffering. Moreover the Book of Job essentially poses, but never answers, the perennial human question of "why do bad things happen to good people?"

In the story of Job, which we only get a snippet of in the first reading, Job is said to be a truly good man who begins to experience a lot of suffering and therefore he starts to intensely question God about it. We heard some of Job's words today in the first reading: "Is not man's life on earth a drudgery?...I have been assigned months of misery... I am filled with restlessness...My days...come to an end without hope... I shall not see happiness again." Poor Job is not exactly your "big ball of sunshine"—this is someone who definitely needs a hug. Job is clearly someone who has *no hope* in the midst of great suffering—someone who seems consumed by sorrow and despair. One could say that Job's bleak perspective on life represents the views of many who lived long *before* the coming of the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now fast-forward a few centuries to the second reading from the New Testament, where we meet St. Paul, who *was an actual historical person* whose letters depict actual historical events and people who lived in the first century AD. And *unlike* the author(s) of the Book of Job, St. Paul is writing *after* the coming of the Messiah and *after* the glorious life, death, and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

*Unlike* Job, who because of his suffering is filled with despair, St. Paul, who, *despite all of his suffering*, is *filled with hope*! St. Paul is a man who *suffers greatly*, yet at the same time possesses *tremendous* faith, hope, and love! Unlike Job, St. Paul is a man filled with hope *precisely because he has encountered the risen Jesus—precisely because* he has been *transformed* by the crucified and risen Savior!

Therefore, St. Paul's outlook on suffering and life is totally informed by his faith in Christ, who *definitively* conquered sin and death and *redeemed suffering by transforming it* into a means of sanctification and salvation. In fact, St. Paul lovingly gives his entire life to the spreading of the Gospel *precisely because* he wants to help instill that same faith, hope, and love in others that has been poured out to him by Christ! St. Paul's entire life as an "Apostle to the Gentiles" is driven by a joyful desire to help those in darkness and despair discover the *same* light, the *same* salvation, the *same* healing that he discovered.

The Savior who transforms St. Paul's life and fills him with faith, hope, and love, is the same Savior we meet in the Gospel today. In fact, if the first and second readings are like a "before and after" depiction of

human life in different time periods of salvation history, then the Gospel today provides us with the fundamental reason *why* there's a stark contrast between the words of Job and the words of St. Paul. In today's Gospel, we see God's *ultimate response to Job in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ*. And in today's Gospel, we see how God approaches those who suffer: with unconditional, burning love and compassion and with a divine desire to heal, help, and save.

Ultimately, our Lord Jesus Christ *is* the definitive answer to the problem of human suffering that plagued the character of Job. Job certainly did not know Christ, but given Job's great suffering and hopelessness, he needed Christ, Who *is the glorious hope of all of suffer in any way*. Brothers and sisters, who are the "Jobs" in our life? In other words, is there anyone in our life who is in the midst of great suffering and is losing hope? Maybe at this point in our lives, *we* feel like Job and are questioning God out of anger and hopelessness.

Whatever the case may be, one of the beautiful truths about the Catholic Church is that *we're a family*—and if we're a family then we need to love, help, and support each other as best as we can. The

Church exists to bring the saving grace and healing love of Christ to all those in need. That being said, we all need to be reminded of our *sacred duty* as disciples of Christ to look out for each other, to help each other in any way that's possible. If you know of someone in your family or among your friends, classmates, or co-workers who's suffering in any way, *reach out to them* in love and compassion and let them know that you're there. You might not be able to fix all of their problems, and that's okay—most of the time, we as human beings can't fix everyone's problems, *but at least we can love them and let them know that they're not alone*. As disciples of Christ, we're called to bring the saving love, compassion, and mercy of our victorious Savior to all those around us, especially those in our life who are suffering and losing hope.

That being said, I'd like to speak now directly to anyone here who is suffering from depression, anxiety, fear, loneliness, or despair: *There is hope. There is help. You are not alone. Christ and His Church love you and are with you*. Your priests love you and are here for you to listen and help in any way that we can. We're only a phone call or e-mail away. And if we as priests can't help you, then we can refer you to

someone who can. Out of His great love for us and for all those who suffer in any way, our Heavenly Father gives us well-trained and professional counselors, therapists, doctors, psychiatrists, and psychologists to help us and heal us. There is *absolutely no shame* in seeking out such help and our Lord can certainly help us and heal us through such noble professions.

So as we prepare to worship and encounter Christ our Savior in the Most Holy Eucharist, let us pray: Lord Jesus, give us the grace to entrust ourselves, and all of our fears, all of our ailments, and all of our suffering to you, so that You may carry us by Your love and strengthen us in hope. Shower us with Your grace Lord so that we may lovingly reach out to those who are suffering in any way and make You present to them, for you are the Light of the world and the Hope of the hopeless. Amen.