



Boston Catholic Journal

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GOD AND HUMAN SUFFERING

PART I



"Naked I came forth from my mother's womb, and naked shall I go back again.
The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!"

"In all this Job did not sin"

Job 1.21-22

"Sit Nomen Domini benedictus."

Job lost everything. *Everything*. Children. House. Health. Good name. Property ... You name it, Job lost it. Covered with boils from "the sole of his foot to the crown of his head", he sat upon the ashes he poured over his head and scraped himself with a potsherd. Even his wife reviled him: "Curse God and die." Three friends came, barely recognizing Job, and sat a week with him in silence. They then proceeded to console Job by convicting him of his sins.

Finally, Job himself uttered what we all have uttered at one time or another in our lives:

"Why did I not die at birth, come forth from the womb and expire?"

Would that his nakedness had *never* been clothed in honor and glory, for then, he could not know the pain of losing what he never had. God had "put a hedge about him and his house and all that he had, on every side."

The evil one knew this, tore down the hedge, devastated the house, and tempted Job to despair ... to give up on God.

And, yet ... "in all this, Job did not sin." Job was blameless before God.

We *know* Job.

We have *been* Job in one form or another.

We have been devastated, deprived, lost our health, our jobs, our dignity, security, esteem ... even our families.

How do we console ourselves? As Job's friends consoled him? By telling ourselves that it is, in sense, *just* ... a justice we had somehow managed to escape and that has inevitably and finally caught up with us?

Job's misfortunes were not just.

They were not God's "payback".

Even were justice demanded of us for our sins – and unlike Job, they are many – it has already been rendered, raised in all our ignominy heaped upon Christ on the Cross.

Yes, God is just! But it was God Himself who paid the price of justice in the shattered humanity of Christ. He did not – and He does not – *exact* it from us. We are far too poor to pay.

God Himself rendered justice to God!

So what of Job? What of us?

You came into this world with nothing. You will leave it with nothing. You think you have worked for, **earned**, all the good things you enjoy, and reckon the day they will be taken from you, injustice. Injustice was never done you, for you never deserved them. What of all your hard work and sweat?

Have you worked harder, more diligently, more desperately, than the poverty stricken farmer in Africa? Why is he not adorned as you? Why is his plate empty?

If you possess power, wealth, esteem, glory, in this world, do not congratulate yourself on your diligence, your "uncanny" insight, your "good luck" and success. *It is more appropriate to tremble.*

Behold Job.

And also behold Christ, Christ Who was *also* tempted by that same evil one who, in his empty promise, is frightfully revealing:

"And the devil took Him up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said to Him, "To you I will give all, this authority and their glory; **for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will.**"
(Saint Luke 4.5-6)

Ask yourself soberly: whence your prosperity, your power, your wealth? From whom and to what end? And over the dignity of how many people did you acquire it?

Job he tempted to despair in having lost all that was **not** his to begin with.

Christ he tempted to idolatry by emptily promising to give Him what *was already His to begin with.*

Who said that wealth, prosperity, power was his to give? And who was it that took it away from Job – what was his to give and his to take?

Misfortunes are not from God. Nor are they the penalty of your sins (for you would have nothing now, would you?)

Misfortunes, suffering, want, pain, destitution, illness, are evils – out of which God ever brings good ... as He did to Job who "in all this did not sin."

May we do likewise in the face of misfortune, knowing the ever redemptive love of God lifting us up to holiness, before the relentless malice that would pull us down to despair.

The house that God has prepared for you will not collapse. Let us put our treasures there -- and know our own nakedness.



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