

## **Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B**

*Job 7:1-4, 6-7   I Corinthians 9:16-19, 22-23 —   Mark 1:29-39*

### ***HOMILY***

In spite of a few signs of light at the end of the tunnel, the score of new infections, hospitalisations and loss of lives still bears witness to the fact that we are by and large in the middle of some dark place. The whole world is certainly still in a dark place.

In today's First Reading Job is certainly in a very dark place. He has lost everything, wealth, family, health. He sits on a rubbish-heap, scratching his sores with a broken pot. The experience of suffering in ourselves or in others can often shake our faith to the core. This is so evident in the situation of Job. But the striking thing about Job is that he articulates his darkness of spirit before God. His way of addressing God is very honest and, at times, very angry. He feels that God is oppressing him. The problem of evil and the suffering it produces is not easily resolved intellectually for people of faith. How did Jesus deal with the problem of evil and the suffering it produces?

The gospel reading today, short as it is, suggests that Jesus often found himself surrounded by suffering. Having healed a very disturbed man in the synagogue of Capernaum, he immediately goes to the house of Simon Peter and heals the mother of his wife. Then we see that all the sick of the town, 'the whole town', then come crowding around the door of Simon's house, looking for Jesus to heal them. How exactly did he deal with suffering in his midst? To answer this question let us first look at how he dealt with his own personal suffering at the end of his life.

When Jesus himself entered the dark valley of suffering and loss, he certainly had his own questions, crying aloud from the cross, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' This is not an intellectual question about the place of suffering in a world created by a good Creator. It is a much more heartfelt and personal question, 'Where are you, God, in my suffering?' It is the kind of question Job addresses to God throughout his long dialogue with God. In so many ways Job is saying: "Where are you God, in my suffering?" Just like Job's question, Jesus' question from the cross was prayer. He was addressing God directly in prayer.

In the gospel reading of today, although surrounded by the endless suffering of others, there comes a time when Jesus needs to go off alone to pray. In short, Job prays, Jesus prays in the moment of his personal suffering and we also see Jesus praying confronted with the suffering of others in the Gospel of today. It is as if Jesus needed to bring all this suffering and its impact on him to God in prayer.

That's why even though everyone is searching for him, Jesus knows that he needs time and space to search for God in prayer.

Therefore, in such difficult and dark moments as at this time we most need to keep the lines of communication open to God, even if it is only to complain to God, or even if it is to be angry at God as Job did. Suffering calls for keeping the lines of communication open to God.