

The Pit of Misery

“Is not man’s life on earth a drudgery with months of misery?”

Job 7: 3

There is a current commercial sponsored by Bud Light beer and the setting is a king in his hall seated on his throne receiving tribute from his loyal subjects. The smart ones realize that the king loves Bud Light so they each bring a couple of six packs or a case of Bud Light. The King thanks them and says in appreciation: “Dilly! Dilly!” But one subject brings along some Ale that he personally enjoys and offers the Ale to the king. The king asks what it is and upon hearing he calls forth one of the knights to take the subject into custody and take him for a time to the “pit of misery.” Later on we will see the “Pit of misery” and it will be a dungeon with torture implements everywhere. No “Dilly! Dilly!” for this guy.

In today’s first reading we get to overhear the private musings of a man named Job. He is a good man, a righteous man. And suddenly all manner of evil things befall him. At the beginning of the Book of Job we learn that Satan comes before the throne of God and asks for permission to test Job to see how good a man he really is or whether when things go bad Job will turn on God. And so Satan destroys or attacks everything Job enjoys or is blessed with. His children are killed, his crops are ruined, and his herds are stolen and so on.

Job speaks about feeling as if this pain and loss has somehow been incorrectly assigned to him and it is lasting for months, months of misery not like the pit of misery of the humorous commercial but real misery. And then today’s passage is Job trying to make sense of this all happening to him even though he has been good and obeyed the commandments. The whole Book of Job is about the very frequently asked human question: Why do bad things happen to good people?

Often the way we think is that if we are good we will be protected and spared and bad things will not happen to us. It becomes our expectation. But then bad things do happen and so we are troubled. Why doesn’t God stop the bad things from happening, we ask? There is an answer and it has to do with freedom. When God created the angels they were given the gift of spiritual freedom. They each had to choose for God or against God. Some chose against and were removed from living in the kingdom of heaven.

And when God created us we too were given the gift of a freedom that enables us to make choices and direct our lives. Our freedom lasts for as long as we live on earth. Freedom is for this life; not the next. Think about that. God has chosen to respect our freedom even when we misuse it or use our freedom to choose to sin, or hurt someone, or use things improperly to our own advantage. God allows us to lie and steal and lust. Not because God wants these things but because the gift of freedom can be misused that way if we so choose. But by design it is to be used in harmony and conformity with the creation established by God—in all aspects of our human life. There will come a day of reckoning, a Day of Judgment when we will have to give an accounting of those things we did which we never renounced, ask pardoned for or regretted.

Sometimes our own misuse of freedom gets us into trouble and is the source of a lot of our pain. Sometimes it is what happens to us when others sin against us that injures, hurts or harms us. In today’s gospel from Saint Mark we see Jesus heal Simon Peter’s mother-in-law and then after sunset he cures those who are ill or in the control of demonic forces or compulsions. That is what Jesus comes to do. He wants to renew the face of the earth. He wants to restore those who are sick or weary or out

of control in their lives. He seeks to heal the broken-hearted. And the refrain from the psalm for today says as much: Praise the Lord who heals the broken-hearted. The destructive effects of the misuse of our freedom is sometimes intentional and sometimes not. But the pain and the loss is always real. We have to bear it. We have to help others to bear it. And we have to bring our pain and loss to Our Lord as the people around Capernaum did that night at Peter's house. The Lord alone has the power to heal the broken heart—ours or someone else's. Christ himself entered the pit of misery himself to bring out all those who had been afflicted. We bless throats with the Lord's blessing today so that our throats might be healed. We begin our Catholic Charities Appeal today which is designed for us to participate in helping to heal and liberate those struck down by the negative forces of life. We continue the Lord's healing of the brokenhearted,