

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



**Fr Michael says:**

### **Jesus' Response to Suffering**

One of the eternal issues with which we have to face is that of suffering – particularly when it is for innocents, the young and other poignant situations. Our theme today seeks to guide us as we do this. Job is THE Book of the Hebrew Testament which looks at this squarely. The common understanding then was that it was a result of sin – hence his pessimistic attitude. Jesus leads us to widen our vision and Paul reinforces this trend by his commitment to preaching and ministry. Jesus is faced with actual suffering and so brings healing and salvation, empowered by a profound sense of prayer, His relationship with His Father.

He is clear – suffering is NOT caused by sin (Jesus and the Blind Man, John 9) God does not see that which is negative as it has no being: He sees how it affects us in our lives and the hurts that we endure. He makes Himself vulnerable for others that He may be along side us. As witness the Jew who was mistreated and made to work in mud and degradation, when taunted by his guards who asked him: “Now where is your God?” To which he replied: “He is here with me in all this mess in which I am working.”

Suffering cuts us off from our normal way of life, many of our friends: Jesus is there to sooth and comfort us, to help us live through the reality of what is going on – it may not change the situation, but it can help us change our attitude towards it and approach things from a new perspective. His presence in us can calm our fears, remove our shame, our despair, and empowers us to find new positive responses. Jesus reveals the compassionate God.

Suffering can challenge those around the sick person and cause us to respond in new and different ways: even our simple presence, without saying anything, is a balm to them: we underestimate who we are as human beings and our own potential: simple touches, caresses, words, care and attention – that is often all we need, but we can be slow to offer them, in these ways we can share in their pain. That was all Mary and the other women could do at the foot of Jesus' Cross. We can live this time of Passion in the sure and certain hope of the Resurrection and New Life, here and in eternity.

Dame Maria Boulding, OSB, was suffering much and reflecting on it, when she wrote these words: “These months of illness have become for me a journey of discovery.... New understanding of friendship, love and tenderness has been given. There is a way to walk, even as I grow weaker. Love is communicated at levels of shared suffering, tenderness and bodily care that I have never touched before and my weakness has been needed to open them. The sacramental reality of Christ's Body has become tangible. I am being shown the depth of love in those closest to me and discovering in new ways what Christian community is. I am now able to accept the love of others and believe in it, like a helpless child who has nothing to give except its need.” This new freedom, allows us then to say “Yes” to God and He accepts us!

## Reflection for 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the year B, 2015



### Fr Tom says:

Job always gets short shrift in commentaries and in people's general understanding. Why? Because we do not like the fact that we are very much like him and we go through the same struggles, even though, unlike him, we have rarely lost everything. Isn't it true that we bewail our situation when things go radically wrong or our plans have failed dismally or we have made some very bad choices and, especially when we have lost a loved one? These are the times when we are made to realise, like Job, that we are not in control of our lives, when we become sensitively aware of our short-comings and failings, and frankly we lose hope and sense of purpose and direction in our lives. Then, our days seem too long and our nights even longer and we feel very, very sorry for ourselves. These are the times when we feel very much alone and cut-off from others, even members of our family and close friends, and when we feel forsaken by God (and more often than not that we believe that we are being punished by God and do not know why?)

If we have learned nothing else from Jesus, he has made it very clear to us that suffering is not a punishment. His crucifixion was not a punishment. What had Jesus done wrong?? His crucifixion was a sign that the leaders of the community had rejected him, that he was excluded; it was to make clear to him that he did not belong. In the process, he identified with all those who are excluded from society, those who are told they do not belong - the homeless, the refugees, the person who does not fit in. Remember, even the friends of Jesus left him alone! When we are seriously ill, we are sent away from our families into hospital and, even though that is a loving environment and family come to visit, we still feel separated and in a place that do not want to be, but can do nothing about it. In his crucifixion Jesus embraced all this alienation, isolation, rejection, hatred and suffering and used it to set, not just a few people, free but to set us all free. He turns evil on its head.

Commentators often want to tell us why Jesus went to pray and what they believe he prayed about. The fact is, we do not know. But there is an added thought that in going off alone to pray, Jesus was identifying with the excluded, the isolated, those who 'do not belong!!' He was, for a few moments putting himself in the place of Job, alone with God, and in so doing, turning that lonely place into a holy place. It was these experiences of prayer alone with God that helped him empathise more closely to the lonely and isolated people whom he encountered then and, therefore, now in our world.

In taking all this on himself in his crucifixion, dying and rising, Jesus has shown us that even these negative and life draining experiences can be, as he showed us, used to set free not just oneself but others. In Jesus case he set everybody free. Maybe that is the message for us this week: that these most difficult struggles and sufferings we experience in life can be a source for us setting others free and for ourselves to find a deeper and richer meaning to life, a source of new life!

*You are not dead yet. It is not too late  
to open your depths by plunging into them  
and drinking in the life  
that reveals itself quietly there. (Rainer Marie Rilke)*