

5B 2018 SML
MK 1:29-39

This morning's gospel regarding illness, disease, and driving out demons puts the problem of evil front and center, and begs the question, "If God really exists, how could there possibly be so much wickedness, corruption and suffering in the world?"

A 19th century philosopher worded his objection this way: "If an omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent God exists, there would be no evil, for:

- ✓ in His omniscience He would know about it,
- ✓ in His omnipotence he could do something about it,
- ✓ and in His omnibenevolence he would want to do something about it.

Therefore, if there is evil (and there surely is), then such a God does not exist.

Now there are three ways not so much to solve the problem of evil but rather to "dissolve" the problem of evil.

The first is atheism. If there is no God, then the dilemma of evil vs. God goes away and there is nothing to explain.

The second is what is offered by several modern theologians, which is to say that God is certainly good and all

knowing, but he is not all powerful. So even though He knows about our pain and is deeply sympathetic, there's nothing He can do about it.

And the third is to argue that evil is not really evil, as Buddhists believe that suffering is an illusion of our egotism, that is, our incessant self-centeredness.

Obviously, all three dissolutions fall short.

We have also heard it said that God does not cause or create evil, as God is good and only good things come from God. We have heard it said that God permits evil so as to bring about a greater good. A grave illness, a failure in business, a death in the family resulted, over time, in a good that would have never come about had the tragedy never happened. All of us, myself included, have had this principle verified over and over again.

In Scripture, this argument becomes particularly obvious in the Book of Job, from where today's first reading is taken. Job was an utterly righteous man, who in one fell swoop, lost everything that he held dear: family, profession, wealth and health. In the wake of his disaster, three of his friends sat with him for seven days, trying to convince Job that he must have sinned some how, some way, to warrant such divine

punishment, in that, God is permitting these terrible tragedies of Job to bring about the greater good of his repentance. Job knew, and we readers know, that Job was innocent, he rejected his friends' speculations and Job called God on the carpet, if you will, to explain Himself. Here Job is speaking for every believer in God who has suffered unjustly.

In one of the most dramatic scenes in the Bible, God spoke out of the desert whirlwind, "Who is this (Job) that obscures divine plans with words of ignorance? Gird up your loins now, like a man; I will question you, and you tell me the answers (Job 38:2-3) Where were you when I founded the earth? Who determined its size; do you know? Where were you when I said (to the sea) Thus far shall you come but no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stilled! Which is the way to the dwelling of light, and where is the abode of darkness?" (38:4-5, 11, 19)

The point of God's argument is: the suffering of any one person must be seen within the context of the infinitely subtle working out of God's purposes throughout the whole of space and time. In a universe of numberless individuals, events and relations, certain goods can emerge only in balance with

certain evils. Stated simply, there would be no virtue of the martyr without the cruelty of the tyrant.

While this solution to the problem of evil works some of the time, most of the time, this solution also comes up short. Sorry, Job. Sorry, Lord.

For the Christian, the only adequate resolution . . . to the dilemma of a loving God and a universe marked with the presence of evil . . . the only adequate resolution is the one given by God Himself on the Cross of Jesus Christ. On the Cross, the darkness of the human condition met the fullness of divine love and found itself transfigured for life. In the Passion is found all forms of evil: betrayal, denial, corruption, violence, stupidity, injustice and incomparable cruelty. And yet, Jesus overcame them all.

The Romans used to boast of “Pax Romana,” the “peace of Rome.” And the reason why there was peace in the Roman Empire with Caesar Augustus at the helm, and for 200 years following, was the people were threatened with crucifixion. You step out of line and you got crucified. So the cross was everywhere as a cruel reminder of what would happen to you if you “crossed” Rome, pun intended. Well Our Blessed Lord changed all that . . .

For centuries ever since, the cross has become the universal symbol for peace and consolation. I've preached before that I take great consolation in holding a small crucifix in my hand every night to fall asleep, and to look out my bedroom window at the church steeple with the cross on the top of it. What was once THE symbol of fear and persecution and cruelty . . . the symbol of evil, is now THE symbol of how much God, in His infinite goodness, loves us.

In April of 2005, the newly elected pope Benedict XVI came onto the front balcony of St. Peter's Basilica to bless the crowds. On either side of him were cardinals who had just chosen him. The news cameras caught the expression on the face of Cardinal Francis George of Chicago, who was obviously lost in thought. When the cardinal returned home, reporters asked him what he was thinking about at that moment on the balcony.

Here is what he said. "I was gazing over toward the Circus Maximus, toward the Palatine Hill where the Roman Emperors once resided and reigned (with crucifixion as their ace in the hole), where they watched the persecutions of Christians, and I thought, Where are their successors? Where is the successor of Caesar Augustus? And for that matter, who cares? But if

you want to see the successor of Peter, himself crucified like Our Blessed Lord, but upside down, at the hands of those evil murderers, well, he's right here next to me, smiling and waving at the crowds.

We may never know the answer to the problem of evil in a world created by a good and loving God. But I do know one thing. We will always be given the grace to confront evil, to get through evil, and in the end, to overcome evil.