

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

Suffering and Compassion Seventh Week in Ordinary Time Friday, February 28, 2014
8:15 AM **Jas 5:912;** Mk 10:1-12 (How to suffer?)

“Indeed we call blessed those who have persevered.”

We are reading the **Letter of James**, which as I have said before, is cut from the cloth of perennial wisdom, **reflections on the meaning of life and how to live.**

Today the issue is suffering: **how does one suffer? Even why does one suffer?** The first is really more of a wisdom issue than the second. James brings up the great figure of Job. He said, “You have heard of the perseverance of Job.” That is really a great story, **the story of Job.** Why that is a great story is that there is **no theological attempt to explain anything**, just there is Job doing well, fine man, all of a sudden experiences devastation.

In the history of both Jewish and Christian theology **there’s often an attempt to explain things.** Even Jesus interpreted his own death as “for the forgiveness of sins.” That’s an explanation of a sort of why he had to die, or why he chose to die. It doesn’t really explain too much, but it’s a way of putting things into context. **Jewish people, theologians, often said that people suffer because of sin.** It was more or less a punishment or some kind of recompense; sometimes Christians think the same thing. The fact is, however, that **explaining why people suffer is relatively worthless.**

What James is trying to get at is **how to suffer**, to face the fact that people do suffer, and that’s that. Now either **we take this as simply part of life as gently and sweetly and humbly as we can, or we become bitter, enraged, rebellious, angry.** What shall it be? Can anger or bitterness or rage or feeling of being unjustly persecuted help us suffer any less? Absolutely not, in fact, it makes it worse. **Why do we suffer? It is part of life.** When God

sent his very only begotten Son into the world, he did not exempt himself from suffering, so it's part of life.

What is the reason for it? That is probably not something we can put in so many words. **But in suffering we can learn.** We can learn how to have **compassion** for ourselves and others, who are not in control of life. We can learn how we share a common experience, **a common existence, with all living beings.** And beings of a certain level of development surely all experience pain and suffering. We experience the most because we are the most conscious, and we are the most aware of possibilities, and **we can see to some degree into the future and that can actually frighten us.**

This is all in context of God coming into our world and **God sharing our lives**, not to take us out of them but to be with us in them, to be our companion not only in good times, which perhaps the whole world might believe, but also in bad times, in times of great stress, in times of great duress, in times of great pain—**God is with us. We can believe that because we know Jesus himself suffered so terribly in his passion and death.** So **God really has compassion.** Jesus, the God-man has compassion. **We**, therefore, can learn and **acquire compassion** for others, for ourselves as well, and we can learn how we all share in a very similar situation, one of which **we are not in control**, in a way no one is in control, not in the sense we normally think of control.

But in spite of all that, there is a sort of **providential love and care that embraces everything and brings us through everything to its resolution.** That of course is the great Christian hope in resurrection and the glorification of the human nature. What a precious gift it is to have **faith and hope** in this vale of tears.