

Job 38:1-7, 34-41

Hebrews 5:1-10

Mark 10:35-45

In the Church Calendar, today is the 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time. Five more weeks to go before the end of the current Church year. With Easter far behind us, and Christmas more than two months away, it is easy to feel “less religious”, if I may term it this way. You know, less motivated, less energetic in our journey of faith, may be even less devout in our spiritual life. Why is that?

Without the surging energy and the sense of renewal that fills the air at Christmas and Easter, coming to church feels too much like repetition week after week. The excitement of Christmas and Easter is like the way a child feels at the start of a new term. Everything is new: every day a new adventure, every subject a new world awaiting exploration. But as the sense of newness wears off, the days at school can become uninteresting, even dull and boring. It could be the same with us during ordinary time. Church life can feel dull and boring, unless we make the effort to be interested in the people and the things that happen around us. And when we discover more about them, we shall see that God is there. Right there among the people that we know. Right there in the things that happen.

If you found your church life bland and dreary, you are not alone. A little boy who called himself Jack felt the same way. He was taken to church as he grew up but found the services there uninspiring. His distaste for Christianity lasted until adulthood. In fact, by the time he was in secondary school, he lost his Christian faith. Yet his journey of faith did not end there.

Influenced by his readings and a few close friends, Jack rediscovered his faith years later. Jack's conversion to Christianity was a not a sudden experience. He always claimed it was logical and rational, not emotional. He likened this process to being hunted down by God. After his conversion, Jack became a fervent defender of his regained faith, writing books from what he saw as a layman's angle. His most famous apologetic works are *The Problem of Pain*, *Miracles* and *Mere Christianity*. Can you guess Jack's identity? (One more hint: *The Chronicles of Narnia*.) Yes. C. S. Lewis. He never stopped making discoveries. And he made new discoveries about himself and about God.

This is also the message from the Book of Job we heard this morning. At the beginning of his trials, when he lost all he had, Job bravely said “...the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.”(Job 1:21) When Job's friends visited him and suggested that Job had sinned and was being punished, Job thought and thought. He could not find anything that he had done that deserved such afflictions. And so, he longed to find God and lay his case before Him. (Job 23:4) He wanted to ask God why. Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind: where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Who determined its measurements? Who provides for the animals and the birds? Who sustains the whole created universe?

Is this the answer you would have expected if you were Job?

Perhaps, God was asking Job and asking us to contemplate even deeper the subject of suffering. What causes human suffering? What is the purpose of suffering? Why does God allow such things to happen? The answer differs. Depending on which school of philosophy or religion to which you turn to look for an answer. But does that really matter? In this morning's reading, the Lord did not offer Job a direct answer. Instead, He was right there in the whirlwind. God was, and will always be, there with those who are suffering. In a way, this is the best answer ever.

As a matter of fact, even the most thorough understanding of the subject of suffering would not be much help for those who suffer, but the presence of God is. His presence and company is the greatest comfort. After his experience of great afflictions, Job could see his faith and his life in a new light. Through all these, he discovered a better understanding of himself and of God. Suffering allows us to know more about ourselves. It also allows us to know more about God and have a closer relationship with Him.

In the reading from Hebrews this morning, Jesus was described as a high priest. A high priest sacrifices to God on behalf of his people. He communicates the divine will to his people and is a mediator between his people and God. As a high priest, Jesus had never served in the temple. He was not of the priestly Levite tribe, but he was and is the true mediator between God and humanity. Jesus knows what it is like as a human. He knows how it feels to be human. He understands the sufferings of humans. And so, when the disciples began to quarrel among themselves when two of them requested the seats of honour in Jesus' Kingdom, Jesus told them that they must first drink the cup that he drank and be baptized with the baptism that he was baptized with.

I wonder how much the disciples understood when Jesus told them that he came not to be served but to serve and that whoever wished to become great among them must be their servant. But by the time the gospel writer put all these down in writing, he would have a totally different appreciation of what Jesus was talking about. By then, as a leader and a teacher in the early church, the gospel writer would understand how true it was. As a leader among fellow believers, he must be their servant. From such experience, the gospel writer and the apostles learned a deeper perspective of their master's teaching. They discovered from their experience that to be honoured and revered as leaders, they must first learn to serve each other. Quite often, it is through our new experiences that we make new discoveries about God and about ourselves.

Whatever life brings us, whether the time is good or bad, wherever we are and whatever we are doing, there is always something new that we can expect, that awaits us to discover. If we set our hearts on expecting and discovering, we shall find that God is always leading us to know Him better through all kinds of ways. And through these journeys of discovery, we shall also learn more about ourselves and the life that we lead.

May the Lord of discovery teach us to be interested in the people and the things that happen around us, so that when we make our discoveries about them, we shall learn to see God's presence among us. Amen.