

25B 2021

At the end of the Book of Job, God affirms Job in his righteousness, but first God sternly corrects Job for his arrogant assertion that he was correct.

Job did not say, “If I have sinned, I do not know it,” but “I clearly have not sinned and I challenge God to prove otherwise!”

God responds with, “Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?”

Job has been insistent about his own opinion, and this arrogance undermined his own righteousness.

He has denied the wonderful complexity of reality and relationships, a complexity that exceeds the human grasp but is the source of great creativity and beauty, the foundation of love and trust.

Sadly, our culture has become like Job.

People are convinced of their own righteousness and hold their own opinion to be unquestionable.

‘Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?’ indeed.

We no longer even stop to check the facts.

“We are entitled to our own opinion,” we say.

“Entitled” is the right word, and our entitlement blinds us to the beautiful complexity of one another.

We are all far more than our opinions.

We encompass various gifts and desires and interests and forms of compassion.

Where there is no recognition of this superabundance, there can be no faith, no trust, no meaningful relationship.

This is why God criticizes Job.

He had not sinned until he became indignant about being right, insistent that he knew everything, as though superior even to the all-knowing God.

Notice that God does not restore Job's fortunes until Job repents of this blind pride.

As Fr. Richard Elliott reminded us at clergy conference, repentance is not going from doing a bad thing to not doing a bad thing.¹

It is much more profound.

Repentance means learning to relate in a new way.

It requires building trusting relationships, and *we do not trust fully those who only accept part of our being.*

Accepting others in their fullness is the greatest gift we can give.

Profound trust and connection occurs once we put aside the position of the all-knowing superior.

¹ Fr. Richard Elliott, Trinity Retreat Center, Pine Knowles Shores, North Carolina, October 20, 2021.

Once Job acknowledged his inability to know everything, once he admitted that he had ‘hidden counsel,’ that he had prevented any real exchange, God relented and restored Job’s fortunes.

Job’s friends, on the other hand, never repented of their prideful certitude.

Instead of condemning Job, they could have thought to themselves:

“You know, I have never seen my friend Job do a wicked thing, and yet he suffers.

I always thought suffering was visited upon those who sinned, but maybe I was wrong.

Is God telling us something that we have missed?

Is God leading us in a new direction?

I am unable to be certain, at this point, but I can be with my friend Job in his anguish.”

Sadly, they were more interested in being right than in being a friend.

We see the same kind of narrow focus in today’s gospel.

Bartimaeus, a blind man, hears that Jesus is nearby and shouts out to him for help.

Others in the crowd think they know better.

To them, Bartimaeus’ is disturbing the lecture.

“Be quiet. We want to hear!”

Jesus of course, has a broader understanding.

He calls to Bartimaeus and asks what he wants.

Like all of us, Bartimaeus wants healing, which Jesus immediately pronounces, but notice what he says.

Not, “I heal you,” as a one-sided act, but “your faith has made you well.”

In other words, Bartimaeus trusted that, despite the crowd’s attitude, Jesus would speak to him, would not treat him as a nuisance, would see him in the fullness of his being.

Jesus responds by making it clear that Bartimaeus is, in fact, not a nuisance, but a model of faith.

In relationships of trust, even when we do not get everything we want (such as an uninterrupted talk by Jesus), we get something more important.

I have been revisiting the old Star Treks.

I have made my way to season three of “The Next Generation.”

A recent episode that I watched wonderfully illustrated the gospel.

In it, an archeologist is killed by a booby trap left over from a war centuries ago.

Her death leaves behind an eight-year-old orphan, Jeremy.

The spirit beings that still inhabit the planet are upset and want to rectify this final casualty of war.

One of them appears to Jeremy in the guise of his mother and even recreates his former home and pet cat.

The crew of the Enterprise resist these illusions.

They explain to the spirit that this fantasy is ultimately not for the best.

Jeremy must learn, along with all humans, to face the reality of death.

He will not do so alone.

The captain brings in a teenager, Wesley, who had lost his father under the captain's command.

Wesley tells the captain, for the first time, how angry he was that the captain survived when his own father died, but admits that, over time, that anger completely vanished.

This prompts Jeremy to admit that he is angry at Lieutenant Worf, the leader of the expedition when *his* mother died.

The crew acknowledge Jeremy in his anger and tell him honestly that no one can answer his question of why his mom died and Worf did not.

They refuse to pretend, in other words.

What they can do is to recognize the validity of everyone's sometimes conflicting feelings as a way of beginning to work through them together, not to resolve the conflict, but to build stronger trust.

They have, in other words, faith in one another.

Lieutenant Worf then reveals to Jeremy that he himself was orphaned as a child and he would like to unite with Jeremy as brothers to form a family.

The crew cannot return his mother, but they can provide him with relationships that are honest and real.

At this point, the spiritual being realizes that this is how humans handle loss, through honesty and relationship, and not through a protracted illusion.

She withdraws.

The crew succeeded because they acknowledged the validity of everyone's conflicting feelings rather than insisting arrogantly on their own view.

If we are to make room for God to work, then we must allow for the fullness of each person.

God flows through the connections that we thus form.

The writer of Job understood this.

When we reject complexity, we prevent good counsel.

Jesus also understood.

He invites in those who wish to be in relationship in all their complexity and asks us to do the same.

Our sacred purpose is not to be correct, but to be present to one another, to embrace one another's journeys.