

Our readings may be brief today, but they pack plenty of punch. There is a common thread running through Scriptures about God's plans and purposes, which we mortals simply cannot grasp. Even a man as holy and righteous as Job needed to be put into his place by the Lord God. Recall how his three friends tried so hard to convince him that he was guilty of some sin. How else could one explain his misfortune, they thought? Job rejects his friends inadequate explanation, challenging God to respond.

God answers. "Where were you," God asks Job, "when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements— surely you know!"¹ Chapters 38-41 convey a vital lesson worthy of our attention. By correcting Job's friends, God indirectly proved Job's innocence. Still, the mystery of suffering remains.

With all due respect to the U.S. Constitution, the Bible speaks less of a "right" to the pursuit of happiness, as much as an invitation to fullness of life in Christ. The psalmist says: "You will show me the path to life, abounding joy in your presence, the delights at your right hand forever."² Or, "Find your delight in the LORD, who will give you your heart's desire." This is all true, but it often comes with a price. What we have been promised, is nothing other than the Cross. We must embrace it.

Happiness is both a gift and a treasure, and at times life is not fair, is it? Job was righteous and yet horrible things happened to him. "Gird up your loins now, like a man; I will question you, and you tell me the answers!" The Lord spoke with amazing power and boldness. Here's a case in which a longer reading could have been included— we miss the full impact. Chapter 38 alone is but a series of questions posed to Job—I counted 30!

¹ Job 38:4-5

² Psalm 16:11

God makes it clear that Job is not in a position to judge the ways of God. He has not sufficiently understood the power and Majesty of God, though he has known it somewhat. In spite of all that, Job has not said anything contrary to God's will—the difference is between a defect in his understanding and a defect in will.³ If we insist on seeing everything from our own vantage point, we will routinely complain that life is unfair.

It is worth noting that belief in an afterlife was not yet a universal belief at the time of Job. It developed over time. In fact, though the sense of the passage is debated, many think that Job (19:25-27) does indeed look ahead to a resurrection, even if not the glorious kind we know.

For Christians, Job is seen as a pre-figurement of Jesus, the suffering servant. Jesus provides us with an example of patient and innocent suffering which has not been encountered since the time of Job. It is the fundamental point of the Christian faith is one of embracing our crosses in imitation of Him who through his own suffering conquered sin and death once and for all.

In another passage from the Book of Job we read: “For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at last he will stand upon the earth, and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then from my flesh I shall see God.” Eternal life is neither put forth merely as an explanation nor as a justification for earthly suffering. The Book of Job does not even definitively answer the problem of the suffering of the innocent.⁴

Eternal life is our reward for a life of faith, and when we seek out the lost sheep, we do so out of love for their dignity. We rejoice in the finding of a lost sheep, not because we care more about one person than ninety-nine others, but because each person matters. Everyone’s life matters. Each soul is precious in the eyes of the Lord, and so too should it be in ours.

³ Fr. William Most, Commentary on Chapter 38 of Job, from the Catholic Culture website.

⁴ Cf. USCCB Introduction to the Book of Job, commentary. Bible.usccb.org