

Second Sunday of Lent
Sunday 28 February 2010

Its no coincidence that the gospel passage immediately preceding today's gospel story is the one where Jesus asks the question to the disciples, who do you say that I am. And if you remember, Peter responds by saying that Jesus is the Messiah. To which Jesus responds by telling the disciples that he must suffer, be put to death, and then raised up on the third day. Furthermore, he then adds that anyone who wishes to come after him must take up his cross daily and follow him.

After this, the gospel of Luke tells us that eight days later Jesus takes Peter, James and John up Mt. Tabor, and the next thing we know, Jesus is transfigured and is speaking to Moses and Elijah. And what were they talking about? They were talking about the suffering and death that Jesus was about to undergo in Jerusalem. All this talk about suffering and death, it wasn't making a lot of sense to the disciples. They believed that he was the Messiah. Peter, James and John saw him transfigured in his glory. They heard a voice from heaven say, "This is my Son, listen to him." So how then, can anything bad happen to God's anointed one? They are supposed to be on the winning team, how could Jesus suffer the cruel fate of a criminal if he is supposed to lead them on towards liberation and salvation?

Clearly, the disciples didn't yet understand that being on God's side doesn't necessarily free you from pain and suffering. That's not life. Its not uncommon for people to think that if bad things happen to me then that means God must not like me, or that I'm being punished for something, or that there is no God because if there were a God, he wouldn't allow for an evil unjust world to exist. But it is important to remember first of all that Jesus Christ was perfect and yet he suffered unjustly. That being the case, we can't expect that we should be exempt from all pain and hurts.

The truth of the matter is this, God doesn't create evil, but he has allowed for the possibility that it can exist because he wanted to give us the ability to love. That might sound kind of weird, but think about it. What is love? Love first of all is a choice. We choose for example if we are going to make the well being of other people a higher priority than our own wants and desires. We choose if we are going to do good to others, or if we are going to live selfishly. Without that choice, we couldn't really love. If God removed all evil from the world, or if bad things only happened to bad people, and good things only happened to good people, then there really wouldn't be any choice involved would there? You see, God loves us, and he created us to love him back and to love others as well. So if we are going to love, we can't

be a bunch of robots because love is impossible without free will. But with free will, there is also the possibility that we will choose not to love, but to do the opposite. And so because people have in fact not always chosen to love, there are problems, burdens, pain and suffering in the world today.

We have to be able to take the good with the bad if we are to experience life to the fullest. Our willingness to suffer or undergo some trial for the sake of some perceived good is a sign of what we love. People who play sports for example, if they really love what they are doing, they will be willing to push themselves, whether its lifting weights, or running hard, or whatever, and experience physical pain in their workouts routinely, so that they can get better at what they do. People who do not love anything, will not be willing to sacrifice or suffer for anything. (Repeat that) If you saw the movie, ‘The Passion’, then you have an idea of the suffering that Jesus was willing to undergo in order to free us from our sins, it is the ultimate sign of his love for all of humanity.

Therefore Jesus’ suffering had meaning, it wasn’t pointless. He went through it to show us his love for us and redeem us. What greater gift could we possibly ask for? Consequently, when we are able to accept the crosses that come our way in life, and offer it up for the sake of others, or for the sake of Jesus Christ, it isn’t pointless either. We learn from it, we learn how to grow in our love and self-sacrifice. We learn how to be self-giving, emptying ourselves in the way that Jesus emptied himself.

When we share in the cross of Jesus Christ, then we can share in his resurrection. That is when we can become transformed. The more we do this, the more we will be transfigured, and the glory of Christ will be revealed in us.

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