

Homily - Year 5 B - February 4, 2018

Wouldn't it be great if the TV commercial touting that just one push-up or one stalk of broccoli would take care of all of our health needs. If there were the magic pill that could alleviate all of our medical problems, there would be fewer commercials on TV, fewer medical personnel, fewer appointments to make in our lives, and much smaller drug stores.

Physical, emotional, psychological misery exist, and no one of us looks for any of it. When it occurs, we do our best to get rid of it, always looking for the best means to cure or relieve the problem.

Rightfully so, we can get discouraged by our suffering, no matter the shape of the suffering. We might say things like "Why me?" "How do I deserve this suffering?" "I don't deserve to suffer this way." Besides discouragement, some may despair, lose hope or even lose faith in God because of the suffering.

Faced with suffering, even in scripture we hear expressions like: "Is not man's life on earth a drudgery? ... I have been assigned months of misery, and troubled nights have been allotted to me. ... My days ... come to an end without hope ... I shall not see happiness again." These pained expressions come from Job as we hear in the first reading.

In the scriptures there are also many words of hope, expressions of encouragement, and even moments of cure. In the gospel, Jesus cures many people in the passage we heard in today's gospel.

So many have asked, perhaps even including ourselves, if Jesus can perform these cures, why not all the time? Why not for me? That's a tough question that begs an answer, but defies our abilities to comprehend. Even in today's gospel, Jesus is clear in saying that his mission is not to perform miracles, but rather to preach and teach. "Let us go on to the nearby villages that I may preach there also. For this purpose have I come."

So, from that do we infer that God just leaves us to suffer and chooses to cure just a few. Is God that capricious?

Well, first of all, no one of us can pretend to know the mind of God. But we can make a comparison. Say there are two people and each one is given the exact same gifts and talents. However, over time, one person squanders those gifts and talents while another flourishes, uses them well for himself and others. If God were simply a Mr. Fixit, a dispenser of the same talents to all, what would the outcome be? In other words, even if we were cured of a particular illness, are we then assured of a rosy future.

When we think that something is good for us, perhaps God does not think that same way.

Faced with suffering, though, God did something far greater than curing all sickness and suffering. God, in his Son Jesus, took on to himself human suffering and pain by becoming one of us and by enduring the suffering of the crucifixion. God became one of us in all things but sin, including suffering and pain and endured the suffering and sorrow even until death.

So, what do we do? Good times and bad visit everyone. Believers are wise not to succumb to despair during the bad times or allow the good times to make them smug or selfish. Believers strive to bear all, knowing that the end of the story will be revealed in God's own time.

So, should we stop praying for cures? Should we cease asking God to relieve our pain? Absolutely not, we can keep praying for a cure, but to that prayer we need to add a prayer to endure the suffering as did Jesus, a prayer to appreciate how this suffering may ultimately help our human and spiritual growth. Remember what Jesus said in the garden: "Not my will, but thine be done." None of us likes to suffer, none of us wants to see a loved one suffer. Suffering is part of the human condition so much so that God chose to share in the human condition and suffered for us, for our sins. We call that redemptive suffering.

We believe firmly that resurrection, new life, will emerge from the suffering. Today, we pray that as we endure our own sufferings and as we participate in the sufferings of others, we may understand that suffering, turmoil, and pain may be our pathway to ever greater glory.