

Homily, September 3, 2017

Some years ago there was a book entitled "Why bad things happen to good people." I did not read the book. But recently I was reminded of one reason why bad things happen to good people. A little over a week ago my house across the waters was burglarized while I was working with my brother on the property. The reason that bad thing happened to me was that some people do bad things. When people sin, when they do bad things, someone is hurt. On a much larger scale this past week we were reminded of the harm that can come to people and their property from the ill effects of nature. And in cases such as the tropical storm we cannot simply point to some sinner whose bad actions caused the disaster.

While we believe that all evil ultimately is a result of the rejection of God's sovereignty it is harder to relate this to the actions in nature that we call physical evil. Physical evil includes the excesses of nature such as the recent storms in the Gulf. It also includes illness which attacks people without them doing something that literally causes the illness. The catechism tells us that God does not cause such evil, but *"with infinite wisdom and goodness God freely willed to create a world "in a state of journeying" towards its ultimate perfection...With physical good there exists also physical evil as long as creation has not reached perfection."*

The allowance of the existence of physical evil such as illness or natural disaster, is a type of allegory in nature that reminds us that humanity has not yet reached moral perfection. Human persons still fall short of living lives totally in line with God's law. Those would be lives in which no morally evil things are done.

The catechism goes on to speak of God's will and expectation that good may ultimately come from evil. This is certainly confirmed in the case of the current natural disaster. Rather than hear the question of why does God allow this, the question that is most often heard is what can I do to help.

God's response to moral evil was to send His Son into the world to redeem the world. The first order of business was to spare humanity from the just punishment appropriate to the rejection of God; and replace it with mercy for those who are sorry and confess their error before God. This redemption was accomplished by the visible suffering of Jesus Christ upon a cross, as an act of salvation. It was a great act of love to demonstrate how anxious God is that people admit their error and seek God's mercy, rather than be punished in justice. But further, this dramatic expression of love, the desire to suffer on our behalf, or in place of us, made it possible for us to enjoy a new relationship with God that adopts us as His

children. He gives us grace, a share in His life, a new power, to resist future sin and return to Jesus whenever we do. Further the grace and teaching of Jesus guides us in right choices to avoid future sin and not add to the moral evil in the world. Jesus' grace and teaching guide us and empower us to repair the damages caused by sin directly or indirectly, in the world.

The full measure of the cross is what Jesus had in mind when He rebuked Peter in today's Gospel. Peter's impulsive reaction to Jesus' announcement of His suffering and death was an implicit denial of the need for redemption. It also ignored the transformative power of the cross embraced in the lives of Jesus' followers. Jesus' directive that all His followers must take up the cross reminds us of a passage elsewhere in the writings of St. Paul. Paul spoke of the value of his own sufferings when he said his own sufferings made up for what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ, for the Church. I have spoken before about the meaning of this seemingly heretical passage. What the visible sufferings of Paul and others who take up their cross does is remind people that sin still persists in the world and with it suffering. As long as sin and its effects continue to exist in the world it must be resisted in visible and tangible ways. And it must be corrected in visible and tangible ways. The reminder of the need for more people to make use of Jesus' death on the cross is expressed in the continued experiences of suffering in the world. Jesus has won redemption from sin for those who believe in Him. Still more people need to come to believe in Him as their redeemer. However, Jesus has left the job of repairing the damages due to sin in the world to us.

So what are some examples of our daily crosses that battle the evil of sin and its effects? Most immediately is the cross we experience in the effort to be faithful to the teaching of Jesus as articulated by the Church. This is especially true when our faith calls us to reject behaviors encouraged by the culture around us. None of us is exempt from temptation to sin. So, yes, resistance to sin itself can be sacrificial. There is the cross of prudently and yet courageously encouraging others to turn away from sin or to avoid sin. There is the cross of repairing the damage from our own sins. It is not easy to apologize. There is the cross of the effort to help those who are victimized by the sins of others. Alongside this is the cross of generous assistance to those who experience illness, or as in our current concern, natural disasters and floods. And last of all there is the patient endurance on suffering we cannot alter.

Carrying one's cross does not mean failing to take the steps to correct a situation that causes us or someone else pain. We don't have to endure unnecessary crosses, there are plenty of other crosses to embrace in fidelity to Jesus.

In our second reading St. Paul urged us to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice. Our actions, in the body, our daily crosses, are what we offer as a spiritual worship. That is what we should bring to our celebration of the Mass where our daily crosses are joined to the cross of Jesus in this great Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.