



1 Corinthians 10:1-13; Luke 13:1-9
Reverend Giuseppe Mattei (March 23, 2025)

"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God." (1 Peter 3:18)

"We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope." (Romans 5:3-4)

Suffering is a natural experience. It shows up at birth and stays with us through life. It becomes more evident with aging, grieving, getting ill and dying. Sometimes, it is unintentional and comes through "innocent" human interactions. Sometimes, it is provoked and inflicted through harmful conflict and intentional cruelty.

Today's readings take us into the heart of what causes many to be atheists or at least skeptical about the existence of a good God. The question that gets raised is, "If God is good, why is there suffering?" Since religious people are prone to justify God, we take the blame of our own suffering even when we are not clear about what we may have done. Yet, we insist: "Why me?"

Suffering can be deserved, a natural consequence of one's actions, where wrongdoing leads to inevitable hardship.¹ Suffering can also be undeserved. In fact, people suffer when afflicted by health issues, when grieving losses, when struck by natural calamities, or

¹ "The righteous is delivered from trouble, but the wicked falls into it by his own wickedness." (Proverbs 11:8)

when they are victims in times of civil unrest, war or criminal activity.

Whether it is we who suffer personally, or we see our friends or family, our pets and even nature go through suffering, we have a sense of resistance and repulsion. We question the meaning and purpose of suffering. We struggle to understand and make sense of the “Why?” of suffering. We question our faith in the goodness of God. We scrutinize our life choices. We ascribe blame. We judge and belittle. We spiral into helplessness, sarcasm and possibly cynicism.

This dwelling on the inexplicable nature of suffering is universal, transcending cultures and epochs. It is in this crucible of adversity that many find their faith severely tested, and others discover the depths of their resilience.

Paul reminds the Christians of Corinth that some of the people God freed from the Egyptian slavery ended up dying of their own sin in the desert during the Exodus. He tells us that they experienced hard times and succumbed to the temptation to abandon their faith.

All people experience temptations, we included. So, there is no need for us to stand in judgment of others. Difficulties may cause us to be bitter and to challenge the wisdom of the “straight and narrow” way.² When things seem to go well for the bully, the arrogant, the wealthy and the

² Matthew 7:13-14

powerful, the temptation is to reconsider godly choices and fallow suit.³

But the path of true faith demands perseverance. God is faithful and in times of test, God provides strength⁴ and “the way out so that you may be able to endure it.” (1 Cor 10:13)

Suffering, Jesus seems to say in today’s gospel, may be the result of personal choices, accidents or the hardship caused by evil doers. But God is not trying to test or punish you. Just stand firm. Choose to remain faithful, an observer of the Law of Justice, a lover of mercy, a speaker of truth. Choose to stand for the orphan, the widow and the stranger in your midst.⁵ Resist violence with kindness.⁶

Jesus warns those who follow him that if they take his path of non-violence seriously they can expect opposition: if the powerful oppose him with contempt, untruthful accusations and physical violence, we can expect the same treatment for his followers.

So, we need to ask ourselves:

“Have I put my trust in the one who insists...

- on associating with the vulnerable and helpless,
- on healing those broken by society,
- on lifting poor people out of legalized systems of exploitation and poverty,

³ Proverbs 4:14-16; Isaiah 59:7; Psalm 37:16

⁴ Psalm 10

⁵ Psalm 146:9; Deuteronomy 27:19; Psalm 94:6; Jeremiah 7:6, 22:3; Zechariah 7:10; Malachi 3:5

⁶ Matthew 5:9; Proverbs 3:31; Romans 12:17-19; Ephesians 4:31-32

- on feeding those who are deprived of basic care,
- on welcoming and including the alien around God's abundant table,
- on rejecting ethnic, national, religious, and patriarchal superiority?

Solidarity with those who suffer *will* increase your suffering.

But the *benefit* is that your circle of friends will expand, and your sensitivity will open your eyes to notice the injustice present all around you. Your empathy will flourish.

Your suffering will start the moment you feel compassion for other people, but you will not want to retract it because compassion is what brings you closer to God. Your values will align with God's desire for universal wellbeing, and you will not be able to turn a blind eye to corruption and abuse.

God does not abandon those who suffer. God does not abandon those who cause others to suffer. God's forgiveness is gracefully available. Grace abounds for all.

But does it mean I can ignore the suffering that many experience? Their suffering causes God to suffer and will produce my suffering when I will decide that I can't stay silent, when I realize that standing up and advocate, lament and protest is what I am called to do to manifest God's care for the world. Repentance is not about penance; it describes a change of mindset.

May our eyes perceive God's love active in and among us, the reign of God present in our midst. Amen.