

- Kind of an interesting line that Jesus gives us today when He says that those who were killed by various means were not necessarily the worst sinners, but then He says: “*But I tell you, if you do not repent, you will all perish as they did!*”...seemingly pairing earthly punishment WITH sinfulness even though He had just repudiated that idea.
- What I think is happening here is that Jesus is purposely using the earthly sense of perishing in describing the eternal spiritual sense of perishing in order to drive home the necessity of staying faithful to God and repenting of those things which lead us away from God.
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- And this also reminds us that earthly trials, difficulties and sufferings are not necessarily punishments in proportion to how well or how poorly we are living.
- This is a misconception that we have to deal with all the time...even though all the saints suffered, thinking of the martyrs especially. Mary suffered horribly—she who had no sin. And Jesus—God—suffered most of all...suffering one for all, that we might live all for one.
- Suffering is part of our human condition, and because God allows it, it must serve a higher purpose than simply being unpleasant.
- But...regardless of what happens to us in life, God recompenses us for our fidelity...that bearing of fruit that the John the Baptist, the apostles, and Jesus speak of as a requirement for salvation.

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- Now, what is the purpose of suffering?
 - Volumes have been written about the purpose, the value, and even the necessity of suffering.

- Scripture describes suffering in several ways—punishment for disobedience to God, yes...but also for strengthening, for testing of faith, for opportunities for charity, and other reasons.
- Scripture is, of course, replete with examples of suffering due to sin—for punishment. But the goal of punishment in this life—like when you parents punish your children—is reform...to lead to a changing of ways from the bad to the good...for the person's own good.
- God is not a sadist; quite the opposite. He only longs for our good and our happiness. But that can be achieved only by obedience and fidelity—conforming our wills to His...to the absolute good.
- So, punishment in this life for sin is medicinal...to help us realize the self-destructiveness of rebelling against God. We are less foolish to challenge gravity by jumping off a cliff than to challenge God.
- We see God's desire for us in the story of the Prodigal Son. Once the prodigal son's party was over, he began to suffer...and yet that suffering served to bring him back to himself and to reconcile with his Father...who was waiting for him anxiously, and rejoiced exceedingly at his return...just as God does with us.

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- Suffering also serves to strengthen and purify. James exhorts us: *“Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.”* (Jam 1:2-3 RSV)
 - We see this in daily life. Students “suffer” in order to improve their intellects. Military personnel “suffer” in training to strengthen their bodies, minds and wills. WE suffer in our Lenten exercises, not so much for the suffering itself, but to strengthen our wills—exercising willpower in small things, so that we can exercise it in larger things.
 - In a rather imperfect example, we recall the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche: “That which does not kill us makes us stronger.”

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- Suffering can also be simply a test of our faith and trust in God. Scripture is very clear: “*The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold, and the LORD tries hearts.*” (Pro 17:3 RSV)
 - In his story, for instance, Job is described as “...*blameless and upright, one who feared God, and turned away from evil.*” (Job 1:1 RSV)...and yet God allowed that he endure much suffering. Yet, despite his trials which he could not understand, he remained faithful because of his trust in God.
 - Such situations are common in our lives—cancer, deaths, hardships. But, in the end, what matters is our fidelity...and we know God recompenses us for all; we need only have patience, trust, steadfastness and endurance, and then He cannot fail us.
 - Patience and acceptance in suffering can thus become our “proof” to God for our trust in, and love for, Him.

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- And, finally, a reason for suffering may be that we exercise charity towards others...as St. Paul reminds us: “...*we are [God’s] workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*” (Eph 2:10 RSV) ...and Jesus reminds us that we will always have the poor with us, and that we can (and should) help them whenever we can.

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- And so...do not take sufferings or difficulties or disappointments necessarily as a sign of displeasure from God...for, as Jesus assures us: “[*God*] *makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.*” (Mat 5:45 RSV)...and God may simply have other plans for you along a different road.
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 - However, neither should we should be complacent, either in suffering or in lack of suffering...but should always examine our actions to make them ever more in accord with the will of God...and to bear

the good fruit of faith, hope and charity that He calls on us to produce.

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- Sadly, I've known people who were tremendously blessed their whole lives, and yet with one hardship lost their faith—as if God “owed” them perfect lives free of all difficulty.
- And, conversely, some of the most faithful people I've ever known had some of the greatest and long-lasting sufferings and trials.
- So remember St. Paul today: “*We must not grumble, as some of the [Israelites] did [in the desert] and were destroyed...*” They were destroyed because of their ingratitude despite all that God had previously done for them.

- So remember St. James once again: “*Blessed is the man who endures trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love him.*” (James 1:12 RSV)
- God has plans for us that we do not know. He responded to Job by basically saying to him: “Who are you, to question the Creator of Heaven and earth and all that is in them?”
- We need only be faithful, and whatever comes to us will ultimately result to our good—not necessarily here on earth, but in Heaven... where God will say to us: “*Well done, good and faithful servant; come and share your master's joy.*”

Reading I - [Ex 3:1-8a, 13-15](#)

Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian.

Leading the flock across the desert, he came to **Horeb**, the mountain of God.

There an angel of the LORD appeared to Moses in fire flaming out of a bush.

As he looked on, he was surprised to see that the bush, though on fire, was not consumed.

So Moses decided,

“I must go over to look at this remarkable sight, and see why the bush is not burned.”

When the LORD saw him coming over to look at it more closely, God called out to him from the bush, “Moses! Moses!”

He answered, “Here I am.”

God said, “Come no nearer!

Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.

I am the God of your fathers, “he continued,

“the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob.”

Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

But the LORD said,

“I have witnessed the affliction of my people in Egypt and have heard their cry of complaint against their slave drivers, so I know well what they are suffering.

Therefore I have come down to rescue them

from the hands of the Egyptians

and lead them out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey.”

Moses said to God, “But when I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ if they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what am I to tell them?”

God replied, “I AM WHO AM.”

Then he added, “This is what you shall tell the Israelites: I AM sent me to you.”

God spoke further to Moses, “Thus shall you say to the Israelites:

The LORD, the God of your fathers,

the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob,

has sent me to you.

“This is my name forever;

thus am I to be remembered through all generations.”

Responsorial Psalm- [Ps 103: 1-2, 3-4, 6-7, 8, 11](#)

(8a) The Lord is kind and merciful.

Bless the LORD, O my soul;
and all my being, bless his holy name.

Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits.

The Lord is kind and merciful.

He pardons all your iniquities,
heals all your ills,
He redeems your life from destruction,
crowns you with kindness and compassion.

The Lord is kind and merciful.

The LORD secures justice
and the rights of all the oppressed.
He has made known his ways to Moses,
and his deeds to the children of Israel.

The Lord is kind and merciful.

Merciful and gracious is the LORD,
slow to anger and abounding in kindness.
For as the heavens are high above the earth,
so surpassing is his kindness toward those who fear him.

The Lord is kind and merciful.

Reading II - [1 Cor 10:1-6, 10-12](#)

I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters,
that our ancestors were all under the cloud
and all passed through the sea,
and all of them were baptized into Moses
in the cloud and in the sea.

All ate the same spiritual food,
and all drank the same spiritual drink,
for they drank from a spiritual rock that followed them,
and the rock was the Christ.

Yet God was not pleased with most of them,
for they were struck down in the desert.

These things happened as examples for us,
so that we might not desire evil things, as they did.

Do not grumble as some of them did,
and suffered death by the destroyer.

These things happened to them as an example,
and they have been written down as a warning to us,
upon whom the end of the ages has come.

Therefore, whoever thinks he is standing secure
should take care not to fall.

Gospel - [Lk 13:1-9](#)

Some people told Jesus about the Galileans
whose blood Pilate had mingled with the blood of their sacrifices.

Jesus said to them in reply,

“Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way
they were greater sinners than all other Galileans?”

By no means!

But I tell you, if you do not repent,
you will all perish as they did!

Or those eighteen people who were killed
when the tower at Siloam fell on them—

do you think they were more guilty
than everyone else who lived in Jerusalem?”

By no means!

But I tell you, if you do not repent,
you will all perish as they did!”

And he told them this parable:

“There once was a person who had a fig tree planted in his orchard,
and when he came in search of fruit on it but found none,
he said to the gardener,

‘For three years now I have come in search of fruit on this fig tree
but have found none.

So cut it down.

Why should it exhaust the soil?’

He said to him in reply,

‘Sir, leave it for this year also,
and I shall cultivate the ground around it and fertilize it;
it may bear fruit in the future.

If not you can cut it down.’”