



**Homily for the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time**

**Cardiff Cathedral**

**Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> February 2021**

**Archbishop George Stack**

Lying in bed I wonder “When will it be day?”

Risen, I think “When will it be night?”

Restlessly I fret till twilight falls.

Those words of Job in the Old Testament reading might well be in our minds and hearts in these long drawn-out days of lockdown and pandemic isolation. The restlessness caused by restriction creates frustration too. The tragedy caused by the COVID, the medical crisis, the isolation, the suffering, the deaths. “Swifter than a shuttle my days have passed, and vanished, leaving no hope behind” says Job”. The damage caused to the education of our young people, the economic crisis which will affect their future - and ours. No wonder Job called out to God when faced with the tragedy of suffering. So often we echo his cry: *“Why me? What have I done to deserve it? Why does God allow these things to happen?”*.

The question of suffering is one which confronts everyone - believer and non-believer alike. It is a question to which there is no rational answer because by their very nature suffering and pain contradict our desire for life. Despite the fact that as rational beings we are part of the natural world which is born, develops, grows to maturity and dies, on an emotional level we find it difficult to accept how these processes can be lived out in our own living and dying. It was

the French philosopher Jacques Maritain (1882-1976) who wrote *"It is a lucky man who knows why he suffers"*. The natural impulse is to say that suffering is a waste of time. On the other hand, the believer says that no time is wasted in which God is served. The service of God is the sanctification of time. This is probably most true when time weighs heavily up us, when we are no longer "in control". When the only thing to do is trust in God.

This is precisely what Job did. Despite his perfectly human reaction and questioning, he does not lose faith in God. *"The Lord gives, the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord"*. And again *"Naked I came from my mother's womb. Naked I shall return"* (Job 1:21). His final words are these: *"Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know"*.

During these Sundays before Lent, we listen to the stories of Jesus healing the sick, those suffering from disease of one kind or another and those who were possessed, thereby dispossessed of the 'control' of their lives. As he makes his way to Jerusalem, with everything that symbolises in the gospel, Jesus knows that he too must suffer and die in order to confront and transform all those things that separate human beings from God. In today's gospel passage we read that he "raised up" the mother-in-law of Simon Peter. She is "raised

up” in order that she might do some service. *“And I, when I am raised up, will draw everyone to myself”* (John 12:32).

“Where is God in the midst of human suffering?” “Here” says Jesus with arms outstretched on the cross. The lowest point of human history becomes the highest point of the revelation of the love of God for suffering humanity. We see that compassion for the sick and suffering in our present circumstances extended by doctors and nurses, carers and cleaners who are dealing with seemingly endless suffering and death in our hospitals and beyond. The washing and the lifting up of fragile patients, the treatment and technology in battling this deadly virus, all ministered by human hands. The words of St. Teresa of Avila in the 16th century come to mind:

*Christ has no body but yours.*

*No hands, no feet on earth, but yours.*

*Yours are the eyes with which he looks,  
with compassion on the world.*

*Yours are the feet with which he walks*

*To do good.*

*Yours are the hands, yours are the feet*

*Yours are the eyes.*

*Christ has no body now on earth but yours.*

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