

## **DID IT REALLY PLEASE THE LORD TO CRUSH HIM IN INFIRMITY**

The first line of the passage from Isaiah the prophet that was read today has this opening sentence: "It pleased the Lord to crush him in infirmity." I cringe every time I hear that passage read from the pulpit. Can it ever really please the Lord to crush another, any other, in infirmity? This sentence needs some explaining. So, let's dive in.

If it pleases the court, attorneys say. If it is pleasing to my Lord, the king, the Prime Minister says. You may go first, if you please, says one person to another standing in line. Can you please pass the salt? We use the word-please-all the time. All day, every day. We don't ever reflect on where that came from or even why we do except that we were taught that it is polite and expected human behavior. But dig a little deeper. The usage of the word-please-implies a request but without an obligation attached to it. More of a hope; a hope based on something I want or desire or need.

The roots of this polite word are very ancient. The word is used in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah the prophet. Over twenty-five hundred years ago. What does it mean? Who is the Lord referring to? This passage has been designated as one of the Four Suffering Servant passages in Isaiah which point forward to the time when Israel will be delivered from her plight by the Holy One of God. But why would God, whom we now call our Father, in any way be pleased to have his beloved Son crushed in infirmity, weakness? A really good question. More digging.

Fast forward to today's gospel where James and John approach Jesus to ask for—please—the privilege of sitting at his right and left in the Kingdom of God he has come to proclaim. Jesus tells them they are asking but that they have no idea what they are really asking. He asks them a question, as he often does, to answer their question. Can you drink the cup I am to drink? We can, they proclaim. You will drink the cup, Jesus says.

What is the cup he is referring to? Remember the agony in the garden? When Jesus is truly in agony asking God to take away what he is to undergo, the pain, the excruciating rejection, the abandonment, the death. In short, his suffering. His cup is his suffering. And why does Jesus have to suffer anyway? Couldn't God

have done it another way? Of course. Well then why did God choose to do it this way? Another good question.

God sends his beloved because God is love, truly the original Lover and his Son is his Beloved. Why does God send his only begotten Son? To show us first hand and in personal and human fashion that God's love is still real, God's love abides, God's love even forgives. Who? Us, in our sins. Show my people my love, Son. Do whatever it takes. Love them. Even to the point of suffering for them. Endure the ignominy, the injustice, the betrayal, the hatred and the anger. Endure the stripes. Let them even beat on you but remain steadfast, strong and true. Love them even when they are killing you. And He did. Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.

That is what I asked of him, to suffer out of love for those I created—in order to save them. Save them from their sin. Save them from themselves. Even abject suffering. That will show forth the height and depth, the length and breadth of my love for them He who sees you sees the Father. He is my beloved, One after my own heart.

Back to Isaiah the Prophet. The will of the Lord will be accomplished through him and his descendants. Us. The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve. To give his life for the many. That is what it would take. That is what it would cost. That was the price. The Son will pay the price—not in money but in his own blood. That is the cup he will drink. And that is the way the Lord bids you and me to live—for our loved ones and beyond our loved ones. To love them to the point of suffering for them. Yes. Even to that. There are not goodies and baddies with God. There are people who need to be loved—and forgiven.

Think back now to Jesus with Peter, James and John on the Mount of Transfiguration. Mount Tabor. Alone on the top. Moses and Elijah appear. And the Voice of the Father is heard. Do you remember what the voice says? This is my beloved Son. IN WHOM I AM—WELL PLEASED. Listen to HIM! Listen to HIS voice! Listen FOR his voice amid all the voices that crowd your day and your life. Listen to what he is saying to you. In the Scriptures. In the Homily. In the Eucharistic prayer of Consecration. Why do we do this? If it please, my Lord...

May the Lord bless us today and give us his peace.