

## **WHY DOES GOD ALLOW SUFFERING/EVIL?**

When I was young I had many questions. Most of them were “Why” questions. How come this happens? Why that? God gave me just enough tenacity so that I was not easily put off. I would stay with a question seeking an answer until I found something that spoke to me or made sense to me. I was never willing to accept the reasoning that said: “Well that’s just the way things are.” Or, “Because—that’s the way life is.” Not enough. Not satisfactory.

As a result, I came to know many things and understand a lot about life and meaning and how God works in this world. One of the great questions for me and for all of us is the question of “Why does God allow suffering?” “Why does not God do away with evil?” This question comes from personal experience and from observations about life on earth. Our faith tells us that God created all that is. God looked at what had been created. God found it all very good. But then there was the creation of the human person—male and female. God placed his great creation on planet Earth, Beautiful Garden Earth. God provided all that was needed for man and woman. God blessed them. God also pointed out the dangers that surrounded them and gave them instructions as to how they should act.

We all know what happened. Our first parents did not obey God’s word. Did not trust God as God had trusted them. They reach out and took what God had not given. They took for themselves the very thing God pointed out they should not take for nourishment because it would kill them. They did not believe. Did not accept. They ate. And immediately they hid from God. Immediately they were afraid. They had listened to and believed a lie. It cost them dearly. Their disobedience, their act of selfishness touched every living thing. And weakened or contaminated or distorted or twisted or unleashed a spirit of mistrust, abuse and violence.

Now what? What was God to do? Should God just shut down his creation? Because of our sin? That is not God’s way. God was ready with a rescue plan so great was God’s love for the creatures he had made. He would send us his beloved Son. It would take time. It would take centuries to get things ready for the rescue plan to become fully operational. Why? Because God wanted us humans to be part of it. God wanted us to use our freedom, damaged as it was by sin, to cooperate with the plan of salvation. But not force his plan on us. The effect of sin was to darken our intellect,

weaken our will, distort our recognition of what is good and true and beautiful. God persisted anyway.

What was the rescue plan? Forgiveness. Renewed love for a sinning people. Clear teaching about how to live authentically in this world even with sin around us. The assistance of a powerful, abiding Spirit to help us live the way of Jesus. But why did not God take away suffering? Why does God allow evil? Because the suffering comes from the misuse of our freedom. If God wants us to use our freedom to cooperate in his plan, then we need to have and use a real freedom. Everybody does. But not everybody will use their freedom correctly or wisely or with care for the other. Suffering results.

What about evil. It is similar. Freedom is necessary for grace to become operational. The misuse of freedom is what evil is. If God were to remove our freedom, then we would no longer be human beings. But God's will is that we exist and that the way we are to be is as free persons. The downside is that evil still remains possible and suffering will be the result. God's grace alone is the transformative agent in our world and it has already been unleashed in the crucifixion and death and resurrection of Christ.

But there is another question. A corollary. If I live a good life, try to do the right thing, seek to obey what God asks should there not be a kind of protection for me from tragedy, sickness, violence, suffering? I mean, doesn't that kind of make sense? Of course, it makes sense in a certain way. Why should we not be spared if we are good? Jesus himself is the answer to that question. He is good. But not spared by his Father. Not even when he asks the Father to take away the cup that he is facing. Jesus drinks from the cup, tastes death, dies and is buried. But does not stay there.

Jesus' love raises him up and he emerges into life, a life that will not ever end. And he invites you and me to join him in this life—forever. The entrance into this kingdom life is living the way of Jesus right here and right now—even with sin and suffering, evil and death all around us. Jesus asks us to do what the Father asked our first parents to do. Put your trust in me. Live in accordance to my word. And Jesus promises to stay with us, to tend to our needs and growth like the gardener does in the gospel today with the fig tree. Like Moses experiences in the burning bush. Why is the tree not consumed by the fire? What kind of fire burns but does not consume? The fire of Love. The strongest reality in the universe. Stronger even than evil, suffering and death. Unleashed in the person and victory of Jesus Christ.

May He bless us today and give us his peace.