

29th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

St. Mark 10:35-45

The incarnation, God becoming man, is foundational to our faith. The fact is—and it is a fact—God came down from heaven and was born of the Blessed Virgin Mary. He lived amongst us as a man, who had to endure childhood and adolescence just like all of us, who saw His earthly father, St. Joseph, die and had to comfort His mother. He had to leave home to begin His work and somehow make a living in the world, just like all of us. He had friends who were good to Him and sometimes let Him down. He had enemies who bullied Him and teased Him and tried to entrap Him. He saw His friends die, like Lazarus. He often had no place to sleep and no money to buy food. And He was accused of crimes He did not commit and He was sentenced to death. At times He knew such agony that He sweated blood, as in the garden of Gethsemane. He could see the Father face-to-face but He also felt that God had abandoned Him, as on the Cross.

When we suffer one of the most difficult things to bear is the sense of loneliness and isolation. When we suffer one the most comforting things is when we realise that we are not alone but that others have experienced our pain because then we don't feel so alone. This is what the writer of the letter to the Hebrews writes: "[W]e do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin." An ancient Father of the Church, Theodore of Cyrillus, explained it like this: "Since He knows our weakness so well, He can give us the help we need, and when He comes to judge us, He will take that weakness into account in His sentence."

Whilst God is transcendent, that is, above us or beyond us and greater than us, He is not only this. God is also imminent, that is, with us. He is not by our

side as friends are, but with us in each and every moment—in fact, by virtue of our baptism, He is closer to us than we are to ourselves. And that is why the writer of the letter to the Hebrews can also write: “So let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help.”

So why does God allow good people to suffer and tragedy to befall the innocent? He allows it in part because each of us are capable of making our own choices, whether those choices be for good or for bad, and the Lord, unless we seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit, does not interfere in those choices. And the choices that we make, both for good and for bad have an effect on others. That is why there is no such thing as private sin. But God in Christ made Himself subject to the choices of men and women and it was these free choices of others that meant He was accused of crimes and sentenced to death. Christ came to share in our lives as a matter of love, to grant to us the grace to make good and holy choices and to sustain us when we suffer because of our own bad choices and the choices of others. But He also came not to save us for this world, but for the world to come. It is true that he raised men from the dead, like Lazarus, but those men would die again. Instead, because of all that He suffered, He comes now to raise us from the dead, but not to return us to life in this world but to life in the Kingdom of God, where there is no pain and no suffering, but only joy.