

# 12<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

## St. Mark 4:35-41

Since God created man in Adam and Eve humanity has tried to escape suffering, let alone understand why we have to suffer in the first place. The Old Testament prophets saw it as a call from God to repent. The Apostles saw it is a “happy privilege” (*Jas. 1:2*) to imitate Our Lord in His suffering. Those without faith saw it as foolishness. Today, most see it as evil and try to avoid it.<sup>1</sup>

Mother Angelica, whom some of you may know as the foundress of EWTN—the American Catholic television and radio network—called suffering her “helpful companion”<sup>2</sup> that always reminded her that she needed the help of God. It was by her own experience of suffering at a young age that she came to know that there is a God, that God loved her and that God was, actually, interested in her.

But suffering is not something God invented—it is a consequence of man’s pride and disobedience. In the book of Genesis, after Adam and Eve had eaten of the fruit of the forbidden tree, God says to them: “Because you have... eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life... By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground” (*Gen. 3:17-19*). In going against God there was a rupture in the peace of creation and it was from this that came evil. As St. Paul would later say, “the wages of sin is death” (*Rom. 6:23*).

When we speak of evil, we speak of two kinds of evil. The first is what we call “moral evil” which is the suffering caused by man. The second kind of evil

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<sup>1</sup> Petrozzi, E. *Mother Angelica on Suffering and Burnout* (Irondale, Alabama, EWTN Publishing, Inc., 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Wolfe, J.M. “Mother Angelica: Christian Suffering is a ‘Helpful Companion’ on the Road to Heaven”, *National Catholic Register* ([ncregister.com](http://ncregister.com)), 6 April, 2023.

is what we call “natural evil” which is the suffering brought about through the natural world such as storms and floods, droughts and famine, earthquakes and hurricanes. This is because Adam was created from the earth and so united was he to all of creation that his sin brought about evil.

We will never escape suffering in this life, as much as the world tries to give us ways out of the consequences of our actions, which only ever leads to more suffering anyway—whether it is abortion or euthanasia, whether it is drugs or alcohol. Instead, what we must understand is that suffering gives us the chance to respond either for holiness or against holiness. If we look on suffering as the chance for redemption and to witness we choose to believe that God can make of the suffering we bear something that will only be for our good and for the good of others.

When we talk about redemptive suffering, we mean the chance to unite our sufferings with the sufferings of Our Lord. I am sure many of you have been told at times in their life “to offer it up for the holy souls in purgatory”. This is what redemptive suffering is. It is bearing suffering the way Our Lord bore suffering on the Cross; to see that what we are willing to bear in suffering will be for the good not only of ourselves but for others. How? Because humanity brought suffering into the world and when we bear suffering with patience we destroy its power. The Devil wants us to suffer so that we lose hope and abandon God. But when we suffer patiently we show the Devil that we refuse to let go of hope and we will not abandon God. He didn’t abandon us and we are not going to abandon Him.

Then there is another way to bear with suffering and that is what we call witness suffering. Mother Angelica, whom I spoke of earlier, used to have her own television show which she presented for many years. Later in life she suffered a stroke leaving the left side of her face sagging, her speech slurred and a patch over one eye. Everyone expected her to give up her show but she refused and went on because she believed that it would help others in their

suffering, which it did. A woman contacted the television network saying that she had also suffered a stroke and that after this she was too embarrassed to go out in public because of the way she looked and the way she sounded, but after seeing Mother Angelica continue to do her show, she saw that she could go out again and she could continue to live her life. The witness of Mother Angelica's suffering gave her the courage to face her own suffering.<sup>3</sup>

In the Gospel, as the disciples are in the boat they face a storm so powerful that they are afraid they will sink. In all of this Our Lord is with them in the boat, but He is asleep. So they shout at Him, "Master, do you not care? We are going down!" (*Mk. 4:38*). I have no doubt that at times in all of our lives we have wanted to shout the same thing to God and ask Him why He doesn't care what we're going through. It's this sleeping of God, this silence of God, that means we can lose faith in God. But what if it is our lack of faith in the first place that sent God to sleep? St. Hilary of Poitiers (c.310–c.367) said that God sleeps because our apathy—our spiritual laziness—has sent Him to sleep.<sup>4</sup>

So what happens when we suffer? We call on God. And maybe that is why God allows us to suffer or to be tempted, just as the disciples were in the boat. Because maybe then we will remember Him and pray with all our might. Maybe it is because only when we realise that we are powerless do we remember the words of Our Lord who said: "Without me you can do nothing" (*Jn. 15:5*).<sup>5</sup> And one thing often missed in this Gospel is the fact that Our Lord was in the boat with the disciples. He was right there with them and faced the same storm that they did. So we should know that in the midst of our own storms, Our Lord is right there with us—even when we don't seem to see Him.

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<sup>3</sup> Wolfe, J.M. "Mother Angelica: Christian Suffering is a 'Helpful Companion' on the Road to Heaven", *National Catholic Register* (ncregister.com), 6 April, 2023.

<sup>4</sup> Kmita, R.L. "Mysteries of the Bible: God's Sleep", *The Remnant* (remnantnewspaper.com), 14 June 2024.

<sup>5</sup> Kmita, R.L. "Mysteries of the Bible: God's Sleep".

But we could ask then, since He was there with the disciples in the same boat, in the same storm, with the same threat of sinking, did He not wake up Himself and do something? Why did He wait until the disciples had to shout and wake Him up? Maybe it was because as much as they feared what they were facing, He knew that all would be well in the end, and so He could sleep peacefully through it all. Maybe it is to teach us to have the same confidence—a word which literally means “with faith”—to face the sufferings in our own lives and to know that all will be well because, in the end, it was always and will always be Our Lord who is in control.

We must know that nothing happens in this world without the will or permission of God. That no storm lasts forever. That everything, absolutely everything, depends on God. That without God, we cannot solve any problem in our lives. And that prayer, along with fasting and almsgiving, have always been, and will always be, absolutely necessary.<sup>6</sup>

Like Mother Angelica, we need to remember that it is only God’s grace that enables us to do what we need to do, that we are always dependent on Him, and that we should have the confidence that even though we may not necessarily have all that we want, we will have all that we need.

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<sup>6</sup> Kmita, R.L. “Mysteries of the Bible: God’s Sleep”.