

IS THERE A DIVINE JUSTICE?

During the past month I met with some of our young people who are having a rough time dealing with their faith. They have encountered some atheists and non believers who raised some questions challenging the existence of the Lord. They were in great doubts about the Divine care for the human race. Some of these questions were:

1. Why do disasters like droughts, floods, earthquakes and volcanoes take place? And why do millions of people, particularly young children perish in these disasters?
2. Where is the Divine justice when a child is born in poverty, with a bad temper and inherits crippling and serious illnesses that last him a lifetime? Meanwhile, another child is born healthy and wealthy and inherits superior social and cultural capabilities?
3. Why is a child born handicapped?
4. Where is the Divine justice when young children lose their parents in accidents or because of fatal illnesses?
5. Where is the Divine care when people are living with enormous pain and suffering from diseases like cancer and AIDS?
6. Why should a person suffer from his violent acts which are due to a nervous disease that he acquired or inherited?
7. Why doesn't the Lord destroy the evil spirit that ruin the lives of many?
8. Why doesn't the Lord eliminate evil from the world so that every one can live in peace?

Some people think that through these questions they can destroy the foundations of the Divine faith. They also think that they can demolish every religious view of the Lord's justice and His Divine care. They have ignored the following facts:

OUR PRESENT EXISTENCE AND OUR ETERNAL EXISTENCE

When man is over burdened with the bitterness of pain, the world becomes so tight around him and he feels that everyone had left him; even his closest relatives, his parents or his spouse, that they do not share his pains or his sufferings. Then he looks towards heaven hoping to find the good God who will ease his pain. And when he thinks that the Lord is not listening, he cries where is the Divine justice? Why does the Lord isolate Himself in His heaven and leaves us on this earth with endless suffering? Why doesn't He feel our weaknesses and share our burdens? Why does he leave things to happen

without any guidance and lets fate and mere chance control our lives and makes us live as puppets in the hands of cruel events?

The secret behind man's cries is the fact that there is a tremendous difference between man's ways and the Lord's ways in looking at event, evaluating them and measuring them. The human being has limited capabilities and a limited amount of time to live on this earth. Therefore, he is totally absorbed by his limited life in this world as an existence that he cannot overlook. Consequently, he will seek every temporary satisfaction and worldly happiness saying "let us eat and drink, we will die tomorrow." But the Lord with His unlimited wisdom and unconfined existence looks at man as his most favorite, above all other creatures. He considers him as far more valuable than to live temporarily, then die and vanish. Man is the son of God and God wants to elevate him to live in heaven with his heavenly Father beyond the limits of time. God also wants man to live the endlessly mutual divine love and to share the eternally filling heavenly glories.

The Lord created man as a body and soul to live on earth satisfying his bodily and spiritual needs in a real, but temporary manner. He leads him to an eternal life through which he acquires heavenly glories for his body and spirit to enjoy. Through this realistic eternal view, no matter how severe our sufferings are, they become passing moments that prepare us to the eternal glory. Therefore, when St. Paul was talking about faith as the desire for the heavenly kingdom (Hebrews 11: 16), he said "By faith when, Abraham was tested, he offered Isaac...." (Hebrews 17) and "By faith when Moses became of age, he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer afflictions with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin". (Hebrews 11: 24, 25). As though looking for heavenly rewards, the pain and suffering were replaced with joy and happiness.

Through the material views that prevail in the world nowadays, heaven is hidden from the human vision. Thus, the whole world became so tight and men became so bitter and desperate that they could not compensate the pain with the spirit of power and victory; rejoicing deeply above all timely and painful events. I met a young man in Australia whose physician advised him to arrange all matters for his family because he had a few weeks to live. Cancer had taken over all his body. I saw nothing but joy filling his life, peace and joy were coming out of his heart. Cancer did not shake him nor did he fear death, or worry about leaving his wife and two little daughters. He told me repeatedly "I am lucky that the Lord gave me this sickness so that I can get ready. I am eager to see my Christ."

St. Paul said: "If in this life only, we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable" (1 Cor. 15: 19).

At Christ's birth the children of Bethlehem were killed by Herod's orders. Their mothers wept and refused to be comforted because they were no more (Matt. 2: 18). But, as time rapidly passed, this whole crowd who was unjustly killed lived and enjoyed the eternal company of Christ.

These are moments that will pass, and our sufferings will be converted to glories that accumulate in our eternal inheritance.

THE HUMAN ROLE IN THE PROBLEM OF PAIN

Quite often man rebukes the Lord for the pains that the human race suffers from, ignoring the fact that he himself creates a lot of these pains. Man also ignores the capabilities given to him that may transfer these pains to constructive tools. As an example:

The world bitterly cries because of the spread of Aids which costs societies great losses in money and human lives. Who created this disease? Isn't it the insistence of people to live a corrupted sexual life, particularly the homosexual behavior which (civilized) societies try to legalize as an acceptable and a healthy way of life. In New York an Aids patient costs the hospital an average of \$ 13,400 and in San Francisco between 25 and 35 thousand dollars. It is estimated that in 1991, the medical care for Aids will cost the United States 16 billion dollars. Isn't humanity which is suffering from a lot of famines a lot more worthy of these investments?

We blame God for natural disasters instead of blaming ourselves for disasters caused by war. However, we spend billions of dollars on research and development of military weapons. If the Lord allows natural disasters, it is for stressing the need to practice love and unity. But unfortunately, man carries in himself selfishness instead of love. In the same society, and sometimes in the same family, we find people dying of starvation while others are suffering from the sicknesses of luxury.

THE HOLINESS OF HUMAN LIBERTY

Some people protest at the Divine care in view of the presence of evil in the world, saying: "what is the fault of the victim that suffers from the unjust who performs the evil." Those people are ignoring the greatest gift given to man by the good Lord: human liberty. The Lord gave us the freedom of choice in everything, even in personally accepting Him or resisting Him. He never wanted man to be a machine unwillingly operated by God to perform His good will. On the contrary, He wanted man to be of a sound mind, capable of making his own decisions based on his own deep convictions.

Sometimes, man misuses his liberty and lives an evil life, behaving violently towards others. This does not conflict with the unbound love of God to man and to God's will to make him in full liberty. But in His Divine justice He will reward every one according to his deeds at the right time. He might leave someone to live an evil life hoping that he

might repent and come back to be nicely rewarded. But if he lives an exceedingly evil life he will drink from the same cup that he himself filled. However, the one who was unjustly treated, the Lord will take him in his bosom and will transfer the injustice to his own good; unless he had fallen under that injustice as a fruit of his hidden evil deeds.

It happened recently that one man was unjustly sentenced to death. When he met with the priest for his final confession he said: "I deserve to die; a few years ago I killed a man and no one saw me and I escaped from justice. Now I will be unjustly executed, because I am innocent of this crime, but I feel that I am getting the fruit of my hidden crime."

PAIN AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF PERSONALITY

Undoubtedly, pain is bitter and unloved. It could be totally destructive for humans. Nevertheless; the badness is not in pain itself, it is in the personality of man who wants to live leisurely, looking for the open and easy road and rejecting the narrow and the hard road to the cross (Matt. 7: 13, 14). " Pain " to the person who takes his life seriously is the " school of philosophy ," through which the soul matures and the personality is polished. Man lives in continuous growth through the experience of suffering and uprightness. As St. John Chrysostom, the man of pains, said about his own painful experience: "Pain is our teacher. We do not bring it to our lives, but we carry it courageously when we are exposed to it, because it is always a plentiful source of good." He also said: "this life is a training ground for pain, it is a battle, and it is a crucible in which goodness fuses and is purified." "As the blowing wind strengthens the cypress tree, so is the pure soul, as that of Job, not affected by pain but grows and becomes more powerful." "Do not desire a life that has no suffering, it has no goodness for you."

What a difference between a spoiled man who chooses the easy and wide road, and a man who is polished by pain and lives with suffering. Frankly, the first one, even in the middle of his pleasures does not feel the taste of his own life and he is unhappy. While the other in the middle of his pains, practices growth and experiences going through life to become a pillar the supports many others.

OUR PAINS ON THE SCALE

Some people ask: "Why does the Lord let young children be molested? Also, why did the Lord let some evil leaders and their soldiers, attack and violently rape innocent and virgin nuns?" (as we read in the history of the church).

Undoubtedly, rape is very bitter to an innocent person who wants to practice and live his human liberty. But the Lord in honoring the liberty of mankind, does not stop evil people from doing their evil deeds. As for those who are violently raped, in God's eyes they are pure and will be rewarded for the bitterness that goes through them, and for their love of purity and cleanliness. They certainly lose their eternal purity and human

dignity and may suffer mentally and psychologically, but the Lord who sees them in private will not ignore them.

PAIN AND THE INHERITED TEMPER

Why would a person who is born to be calm and quiet be rewarded for his quietness, and a person who is born with a violent temper be punished? Someone who, since his childhood is very quiet and another very talkative? A person who by his own nature, does not recognize the trespasses of others, and a person who has a piercing look in everything he sees?

Where is the Divine justice in judging people who have their differences in their tempers, most often, not by their own choice? These questions are due to our lack of understanding of the "pure life." The Lord in His love to mankind does not want to have everyone made of the same mold. The beauty of His people comes from the love and harmony that unite them in spite of the variation and diversity of their natures. The Lord who permitted every person to have his own character, works through the character to form the distinctive personality of that individual. And every one will respect the other even though they have different characters that do not conflict but complement each other to perfection.

A quiet person is sanctified by the Lord's spirit to become a witness for the Bible that lives in him, and the firm person is also sanctified to become a serious leader who practices his firmness in love, an open heart without hurting the feelings of his companions. The silent is a witness by his silence when he is sanctified, and the outspoken speaks the truth. Even "anger" could be a blessing when used against ourselves and against our sin and not against sinners. St. Augustine sees that even what we call bodily motions could be sanctified, and our feelings and sentiments could be converted for the love of God and all people. In other words every element of man's nature, when sanctified by the Lord's Spirit, that works in His church, becomes a constructive force, and when misused becomes a tool for destruction. Quietness when misused destroys. St. Augustine also said that sometimes we slap someone on the face "pretence" to be quiet. This pretension comes from internal dryness and a closed heart and is usually more painful than a real slap.

PAIN AND THE NERVOUS DISEASES

How would a person who suffers from a mental illness be judged when he unconsciously insults or beats someone? I think the Lord knows what is in the heart, and knows the capabilities and the limitations of man. The Lord has an entirely different view, than ours, in judging people. For the Lord does not see as a man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart (1 Sam. 16: 7).

PAIN AND SURRENDER

Some people see religion as a state of surrender. We accept pain and we don't try to overcome it. This is how a person can lose his vitality and his struggle to achieve a better state.

We should differentiate between surrender and yielding. Surrender is a state of weakness accompanied by desperation and carelessness. However, yielding is the acceptance of pain with an open heart and in total confidence in the Lord's love that will transfer the pain to goodness. Therefore as pain intensifies, the believer tends to double his struggle, in a living faith in the kingdom of God, and a strong desire to build himself and the others, even those who dislike him.

With confidence and experience, St. Paul the apostle in the middle of his sufferings, said: "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down but not destroyed, always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body." (2 Cor. 4: 7- 10).

Who was stronger, St. Paul who was bound or Agrippa the king who was trying him? Agrippa said to Paul: "You almost persuaded me to become a Christian" Acts 26: 28.

Who had more strength, the three men or Nebuchadnezzar the king who tried and cast them in the midst of the fiery furnace? The king who was astonished said: "Look, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God" Dan. 3: 25. Our yielding to the hands of the Lord allows us to enjoy His grace and power. It is not out of weakness and it is not a surrender or loss of dignity.

UPRIGHTNESS

Pain is bitter and cruel, but the unity of man with his suffering Christ, fills his heart with love for the Lord and all people. He never gets uptight, he will suffer but will find his comfort deep inside himself as he carries his Christ who gives him a new look to life.

St. John Chrysostom was exiled and he considered it "a visit to many cities" and when he approached death he considered it "a sound sleep, a departure to the heaven and a crossing from one country to the other. A migration from earth to heaven." In the struggle against Satan, he considered him to his benefit, without him how could there be a fight to win and a hope to be crowned?

PAIN AND THE CROSS

Christ did not get rid the world of pain, but came to drink the cup of the world and to lovingly share our burdens and sufferings. So pain became a loving companionship with the Lord and not a Divine wrath or a sign of abandonment. As Christ suffered for His

love of the world, He accepted us to suffer with Him, an indication of love, glory and power.

As St. John Chrysostom said "what a joy to be Christ's company and to suffer with Him and for Him. How glorious is suffering!, it is as if we died with Christ." In his comments on St. Paul's words "For you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake." (Phill. 1: 29). St. John said "He teaches us that suffering is for the grace of the Lord, it is a free gracious gift." Do not be ashamed of this gift. It is more miraculous than the power of resurrection or the performing of miracles."

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