

Fifth Sunday of Lent: Come Out of Your Cave

Unless we are living completely removed from any contact with anyone, we cannot avoid learning that horrible things happen in the world. Children are starving to death in Africa and throughout the world. Teens are being trafficked by the sex trade in Florida and throughout the world. Anti-Semitism is on the rise in the United States and all over the world. Good people die in accidents, or come down with fatal diseases while they are still young.

I obviously could go on and on. The reaction of many to horrible things that take place is “Why?” “Why, God, did you let this happen?” “Why, God, didn’t you prevent this accident?” “Why, God, do you allow pimps and perverts to attack our children and Teens?” Or even, “Why, God, did you take my husband from me, my son, my daughter, my mother, my father?” “Why, God, did you let me come down with this physical condition that I have to deal with every day?” “Why, God, why?”

First of all, God does not do evil. He did not take your loved one who died. He did not need grandpa to be with him in heaven, so he let him die. That would be rather selfish. Some people say that a child died because God needed another angel in heaven. No, No, No! That is blatantly wrong. God has no needs. He does not kill children. He does not kill people to fill up his heavenly court. He did not kill your loved one or allow your loved one to die. He did not afflict you with crones, or epilepsy, or diabetes, or any other challenge you face in life. God does not do bad things.

So then, why does God allow bad things to happen? Bad things happen because God created mankind with free will. He gave us free will so we can choose to love. If we did not have free will, we could not love because love is a choice. Look, a girl and a guy meet each other and feel instantly drawn to each other. They fall in love, supposedly. They are starry eyed. Then, they get to know each other better and better. As time goes on they each become more and more aware of the other person’s warts and pimples and times of bad behavior. Then each make a decision to recognize that the other person’s good qualities outweigh his or her bad qualities. They choose to love that person. Love is a choice.

God created us to love. That is why we have a free will. We can choose to love.

We also can choose not to love. We can choose to hate. We can choose to use others for our own selfish gain. We can choose to traffic Teens to make a great deal of money. There is evil in the world, because mankind in general chose not to love, and men and women in particular choose not to love. Death is in the world as a result of mankind's rejection of the source of life. Good people, innocent people, suffer the result of this choice. This was not God's plan. But it was also not his plan to create mechanical beings who would have no choice but to do his will. He created us to love. He gave us free will so we can love.

And Jesus wept. That's the shortest verse in scripture. It's in today's Gospel. Jesus is summoned to Bethany, where his friends Lazarus, Mary and Margaret lived. Lazarus is sick. By the time Jesus gets there, Lazarus has died. They take him to Lazarus' grave. And Jesus wept.

Perhaps some of us have cried in the last month. There are many levels of crying from weeping at a touching moment in a movie, to being upset with something someone did or said, to a deep wailing within oneself when a loved one dies. This last type of crying is what Jesus experienced at the grave of his friend, Lazarus.

And Jesus wept. Scripture was not originally written with chapters and verses as we find now in our bibles. Chapters and verses were added by the monks of the middle ages who transcribed scripture and sought to make it easier to find various passages. These monks prayed as they worked. One of them was inspired to see the most important sentence in today's long Gospel. It was only a few words, but the monk gave it the weight of a full verse. The verse was: Jesus wept. Jesus felt what we feel when we are torn up inside. He was one of us in all things but sin. He knows what we experience when we see the result of evil in the world, when our perfectly innocent loved one dies. He moans and groans and cries with us.

Jesus stood at the grave and called, "Lazarus, come out!" And Lazarus came out, still wrapped in burial clothes. "Unbind him," Jesus

said. Release him from the ties of death. This is more than just raising Lazarus from the dead. This is Jesus proclaiming that He is the Lord of Life. This is Jesus saying that those who believe in Him will share in His Eternal Life. This is Jesus telling us that our physical lives might come to an end, but the eternal life He gives us at baptism remains forever, unless, sadly, if we reject this life. "Lazarus come out!" The Lord of Life wants to unbind us from all that is holding us in death.

What are our tombs? Perhaps the tomb is a man cave where there are immoral things viewed on a screen. Maybe that man cave is a person's room where no one is allowed to enter not just for privacy but so no family members might find that which should not be there. Maybe our cave is full of material possessions as we grasp more and more, making our stuff the center of our lives. Maybe our tomb is a cave of self-pity. Maybe we are in a cave of self-doubt, a cave where we question our right to be among people who seem to be so much better than us, better wives, better husbands, better priests, better Teens, better Catholics, just all around better people. Maybe we are in a cave where we delight in suffering from wrongs done to us in the past, caves where we refuse to forgive. A great line a missionary once shared with us is: Holding grudges is taking poison and hoping that someone else will get sick.

Whatever our caves may be, we don't need to be rotting there. "Come out!" Jesus calls. Come out and come into life. Jesus is more powerful than anything holding us back, including our sins. He is more powerful than the forces around us and within us that are trying to destroy us.

"Unbind him. Unbind her." We have been freed from the bonds of sin by the Life of the Lord.

And Jesus lives. Two weeks from now we will be celebrating Easter. Easter is the celebration of life, eternal life. The eternal life of the Lord is offered to us. It is ours. But first we have to come out of our caves.