

Commentary to the 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time B



Pain sometimes can be the making of us. Beethoven is the classic example. Deafness hit him as a young man. It did not sit well with the young Ludwig. As a consequence, this period of his life was not distinguished. But once he had come to accept it, his genius bloomed. Arguably his Ninth Symphony is the most beautiful work of music ever written. If Beethoven had written nothing else, the Ninth would have won him immortality. Yet, the night he conducted the symphony for the first time, he could not hear a bar of his music. Nor could he hear the wild applause that greeted its debut. Yet, he sensed his labor was a triumph.

So will we rejoice if we learn to master our pain as Christ would have us.

When it comes our turn to die, as somebody has noted, God will not be shouting to us to help someone else. Rather, He will Himself be rushing to comfort us and He will be telling us that "His love is greater than our pain."

Jesus tells His people that He must suffer and die. In verse 32 of today's Gospel, Mark writes, "But they did not understand what He said..." Perhaps Sigmund Freud would tell us the apostles were blocking out understanding. They had no wish to know what He had spoken to them on this dour subject. They wanted to hear only pleasant lines that promised them happy days.

However, there should be none among us ready to throw the first stone at the twelve. Who among us gets our pleasure out of suffering? It is a condition we wish would become history.

It is said that our conscious life begins with a cry and will end with one. In the first case, it is a shout of bewilderment. And in the second, it is often a cry of pain.

The Gospels assure us that God will not turn His back on our pain. To underline that assurance He sent us His Son. We are, says Michael Himes, what God chose to become. The Jesus story of pain is familiar to us. But we are reminded that without a Good Friday there can be no Easter Sunday.

The British writer CS Lewis wrote an incisive line in *The Problem of Pain*. "God whispers to us in our pleasure, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain."

And why cannot we as Christians shout to another who is in pain? A woman with terminal cancer told me how much the prayers and visits of a fellow Christian mean to her. That visitor brings with him a special broth, mums from his own garden, and the day's newspaper. Then they spend some time in prayer together. That man may be doing but a small thing, but he is doing it with love.

In *Frannie and Zooey* of JD Salinger, we learn of Mama Glass' answer to all difficulties: consecrated chicken soup. Very often a chicken, run quickly through some boiling water, is just the medicine the doctor ordered for many of us.

In Genesis rings that ugly question of Cain, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Christ gives a clear response, "YES!" The genuine Christian looks at the person in trouble and speaks, "I look at you and I see myself." Remember: "Great occasions for service come seldom. Little ones surround us daily."

Furthermore, it is only through suffering whether it be our own or someone else's, that we for the first time begin to appreciate the gifts that God has given us. It has been observed that it took centuries for our ancestors to stand erect and put one foot in front of another. But, as our doctors testify, few of us take the effort to exercise. So, our bodies, these temples of the Holy Ghost, begin to come unglued before our eyes. Do we take care of this wonderful machine that is our body?

Or take the question of sight. As one philosopher noted, so many of us look but do not see. Many of us confess to reading trash. But few of us take the time to read the magnificent prose poetry of the Book of Isaiah or the Psalms or Dag Hammarskjöld's *Markings*. Why not refresh our spirits with the giants?

Or the ability to pray. Reflect on Karl Barth's words. "To clasp hands in prayer is the beginning of an uprising against the disorders of the world."

It is time to begin again. Why do we wait? But be gentle on yourself. Jesus attempted to reach everyone about Him, but He was not successful. Why should you get a hit every time at bat?

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