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## *Why Do Good People Suffer?*

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5<sup>th</sup> Sunday Year B  
February 4, 2018

This past week, I just returned from the HOLY LAND. It was a pilgrimage like none other in the sense that you actually walk in the footsteps of Jesus. We saw the Upper Room where Jesus had the last Supper. We then traveled to the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus experienced his agony in the Garden. The olive trees in the garden are over 2000 years old. They are the same ones Jesus would have walked among. After Jesus was arrested he was taken to Caiaphas' house. We walked the path from the garden through the Kidron Valley to Caiaphas' house. There is now a church built on the ruins of Caiaphas' house. Below his house are the cisterns where prisoners were held. We got to go down into the cistern where Jesus was imprisoned overnight. We went out into the courtyard where Peter denied Jesus. And then we walked the Via Delarosa – the Way of the Cross. The climactic moment for me was offering Mass on Mount Calvary where Jesus died and then offering Mass inside the tomb where Jesus rose from the dead.

After 5 days in Jerusalem we headed north to the Sea of Galilee where most of Jesus' ministry took place. The transition was amazing. Jerusalem is a city, noisy, busy with activity, but Galilee is quiet and peaceful. It's like going out to the country side. We saw the ruins of the house where Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law and we saw the cave along the Sea of Galilee where Jesus prayed. Since the early centuries the cave has been venerated as the "lonely place" where Jesus would go and pray. From the cave you can look out over the Sea of Galilee and watch the sun rise.

This is the first point I want to make about this gospel: When Jesus began his public ministry, there was no one busier than our Lord. He was healing people, casting out demons, and the gospel says, "Everyone was looking for him." And yet he made time to go off by himself and pray. Jesus had his priorities! What is the number one reason why people don't pray? The time pressure problem! I'm too busy. I've said before, BUSY stands for Being Under Satan's Yoke. The devil wants us to get busy, so we lose sight of the one thing necessary: our relationship with God.

The world offers us endless distractions. We have to learn how to say, "No," to good things because we have said "Yes," to the one thing necessary – our relationship with God. Sports are good. We learn team work and how to work with others, but when they interfere with our ability to go to Sunday Mass or our daily prayer, then we've got to say – enough is enough.

I love this quote from CS Lewis: "**Put first things first** and we get second **things** thrown in: **put** second **things first** and we lose both **first** and second **things**."

Let's go deeper. What is really underneath our busyness? I remember back in college when faced with a big exam, often the first thing that I would give up was my prayer! Why? Because of my self-reliance. I didn't really trust God. Or, when I was working as an engineer and had big projects and deadlines to meet, again, the first thing I often let go of was my prayer. Again, I was self-reliant, not really trusting that if I turned to God, God would give me the grace to do what I needed to do. Self-reliance only leads to stress, anxiety, and feelings of being overwhelmed. Prayer, trusting in our Father gives us strength and peace.

Fulton Sheen always said the most important part of his day was his Holy Hour. Once he was giving a retreat to priests and preached about the importance of making a daily holy hour. One of the pastors raised his hand and said, "Archbishop, you have no idea the responsibilities I have. I'm pastor of a huge parish. I have a large school, a big staff, I don't have time for a daily holy hour." Fulton Sheen looked at him and said, "My, with all of your responsibilities, you should make two holy hours a day!"

St. Alphonsus Liguori said if a person is caught in serious sin and begins spending 30 minutes a day in prayer and meditation, one of two things is going to happen: either he will let go of his serious sin and keep praying each day, or he will stop praying and continue in his sin. Serious sin and daily meditation cannot co-exist over the long haul.

There is a beautiful example of prayer in our gospel. When Peter's mother-in-law fell sick, the gospel says the apostles, "immediately told him about her." One of my priest friends keeps a list of people who are in need and prays for them by name every day. Who do we need to tell Jesus about? Who is sick or in need of help in our lives?

Now, one last point about the readings. A major theme of the readings today is suffering. Why do good people suffer? The first reading was from Job. Poor Job was tested and lost everything. Perhaps at times we feel like Job and wonder: Jesus why don't you heal me? Or why don't you heal my family member who is ill?

This past week, I came across an ancient writing by St. Cyril of Jerusalem and he pondered: Jesus healed a man born blind, but what importance is this when there are thousands who are blind? Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, but even this only effected Lazarus. What about the countless numbers who have died?

Jesus performed miracles, but his mission was not to heal everyone. In fact, when the apostles find him and say, "everyone is looking for you." Jesus didn't say, "Let's get to work, I have lots of people to heal." No, he said, "Let's move on to the next village. Jesus did not come to heal everyone. His mission was much greater. His mission was to suffer and die for the salvation of the world so that death and evil and suffering could be destroyed forever.

Physical healings are only temporary. God wants to give us something eternal. He wants to destroy death and misery and suffering forever. Remember the words that surround us

in this Church: “Death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. Behold I make all things new.”

Do you know what happened to Peter’s mother in law? She eventually got sick again and died. You see what’s more important than physical healing? -Our faith in Jesus who promises us something eternal!