

Opening Prayer

Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit that, as the Scriptures are read and discussed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.

Job 23:1-9, 16-17

^{23:1} Then Job answered: ² "Today also my complaint is bitter; his hand is heavy despite my groaning. ³ Oh, that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his dwelling! ⁴ I would lay my case before him, and fill my mouth with arguments. ⁵ I would learn what he would answer me, and understand what he would say to me. ⁶ Would he contend with me in the greatness of his power? No; but he would give heed to me. ⁷ There an upright person could reason with him, and I should be acquitted forever by my judge. ⁸ "If I go forward, he is not there; or backward, I cannot perceive him; ⁹ on the left he hides, and I cannot behold him; I turn to the right, but I cannot see him. ¹⁶ God has made my heart faint; the Almighty has terrified me; ¹⁷ If only I could vanish in darkness, and thick darkness would cover my face!

Commentary

Job knew that his heart was pure, and despite his great loss and oozing sores, he believes that if God would only grant him a trial he could prove his innocence. Vindication would come only if God would listen. As fanciful as the imagined trial appears, Job experiences a problem that brings him back to reality—Where is God? Somehow God is completely absent. God's presence was something he took for granted. Job struggled here, and in other places in his story, with belief in a God of justice while faced with incomprehensible injustice. Could a just God allow suffering? Could God be on the side of the righteous when terrible, undeserved suffering was plaguing God's children? The tension found in this conundrum spans the ages. Through the story of Job we see the timeless dilemma of how a just God could permit an unjust world. With no ready answer available, Job retreated into the dread and trepidation that were his constant companions during his plight.

Reflection

When have you asked, sought, and knocked, but could hear no answer? Why do we want to put God on trial? What are some present-day struggles in the world that come to mind when we struggle with these questions?

Hebrews 4:12-16

^{4:12} Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. ¹³ And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account. ¹⁴ Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Commentary

This lection confronts us with challenging questions: How do we understand the term *word*? Is it to be understood as Jesus, the Word of God? The proclamation found in Scripture? The continuing revelation of God throughout the ages? The answer is “yes”—all three. To fully comprehend the reading, the community must understand that, in this passage, the writer’s intent is not to define the term. Rather than dwell on what it is, the writer proclaims what the *word* does. As we consider the reference in v. 14, it may be helpful to know that the high priest on the Day of Atonement entered through the curtain into the “holy place” where the ark of the covenant rested. He was to perform many rituals for the atonement of Israel’s sin (Leviticus 16). The writer of Hebrews brings this image forward to the time of Jesus, saying he has “passed through the heavens” and is now the high priest who reigns without sin. All this being said, believers were to approach the throne not in sackcloth and ashes with heads bowed in shame, but boldly and with confidence. Through Jesus, the gate to God was open for all.

Reflection

How do you approach God? What makes you hesitant? What gives you confidence?

Mark 10:17-31

^{10:17} As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ¹⁸ Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. ¹⁹ You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother.'" ²⁰ He said to him, "Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth." ²¹ Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." ²² When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions. ²³ Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" ²⁴ And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ It

is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." ²⁶ They were greatly astounded and said to one another, "Then who can be saved?" ²⁷ Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible." ²⁸ Peter began to say to him, "Look, we have left everything and followed you." ²⁹ Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, ³⁰ who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age--houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields with persecutions--and in the age to come eternal life. ³¹ But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first."

Commentary

Our response to this Gospel reading may well depend upon our economic status. Persons who are poor will find hope and justification in this story of the rich man, while those with wealth and status may face the dilemma of justifying their financial situation considering Jesus' way of life. In the hymn, "What a Friend We Have in Jesus," the line, "Jesus knows our every weakness" describes Jesus' insight into this man's need. Yes, he kept the commandments; he had done so all his life. But Jesus looked at him with what we can imagine was a sad smile. For he knew his every weakness. Jesus tenderly told him, "Go, sell all you own...and follow me." Taken aback by this request, the rich man went home brokenhearted and unwilling to give up his earthly fortune. The rich man thought that with all his wealth he could afford to do some good thing that would entitle him to eternal life. Jesus asked for him to possess nothing so that he would become totally dependent upon God. In being dependent on God he would realize that God alone would save him, and he could do nothing to save himself.

Reflection

If you had everything you could imagine, as Job and the rich man did, and you felt Jesus calling you to give it up as a condition of truly following Him, what would be your response? What must you give up in this life to become totally dependent on God?

Responsive Psalter

Psalm 22:1-15

^{22:1} My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?

² O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer;

and by night, but find no rest.

³ Yet you are holy,

enthroned on the praises of Israel.

⁴ **In you our ancestors trusted;**

they trusted, and you delivered them.

⁵ To you they cried, and were saved;

in you they trusted, and were not put to shame.

- ⁶ But I am a worm, and not human;
scorned by others, and despised by the people.
- ⁷ All who see me mock at me;
they make mouths at me, they shake their heads;
- ⁸ "Commit your cause to the LORD;
let him deliver—
let him rescue the one in whom he delights!"
- ⁹ **Yet it was you who took me from the womb;
you kept me safe on my mother's breast.**
- ¹⁰ On you I was cast from my birth,
and since my mother bore me you have been my God.
- ¹¹ **Do not be far from me,
for trouble is near
and there is no one to help.**
- ¹² Many bulls encircle me,
strong bulls of Bashan surround me;
- ¹³ **they open wide their mouths at me,
like a ravening and roaring lion.**
- ¹⁴ I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint;
my heart is like wax;
it is melted within my breast;
- ¹⁵ my mouth is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to my jaws;
you lay me in the dust of death.

Closing Prayer

**Grant, O Lord, that what we have said with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and that what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.**