

Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time
October 6, 2019

*“Until we have suffered something, however little, of Christ’s last hours, we do not know what pain, in the Christian scheme, is really for; nor do we know, until we have suffered with Christ, how bad we are at suffering.” (Dom Hubert van Zeller, **Suffering: The Catholic Answer**, p. 93)*

“God does not condemn man to suffering; man condemns himself to suffering. God tells man what is needed for happiness, and, in refusing God’s terms, man condemns himself to unhappiness.” (van Zeller, p. 3) In the Old Testament book of the prophet Habakkuk, Habakkuk tried to discern the meaning of suffering, using the current events of his time, as it related to the nation of Israel. The prophet wondered why God would either use, or allow, a cruel nation of unbelievers the means to reign dominate over His people, Israel. To find the answer to this question, Habakkuk would spend the first two chapters of his book in dialogue with God. Our first reading today, offers us highlights of their conversation. The answer to this discussion between the two could be summed up thus: “Every wicked nation will be punished by the Lord God of all, and the just man will be saved, provided he perseveres in fidelity toward God and His commands.

Roughly 2,600 years later, we who are living today in these United States of America may find this question rather uninspiring. Although our nation has struggled at times, we are currently living in one of the most wealthy, powerful, and free societies in human history. Why should we concern ourselves with the suffering of the nation of Israel at the hands of the Chaldeans? What could we possibly learn from this? If I answer this as a citizen of this country, then I would reply: “Not much!” If, however, I ask myself this same question placing the sufferings of the Body of Christ, the Church, in the position of Israel, then could I find something to reflect upon? I would now answer: “Yes, most definitely!”

Habakkuk’s question reimagined for our Church: “God, if You all holy and all powerful, then why have you allowed your Church to be plagued by all of the scandals over these past 20 odd years? Why Lord must we endure these ridicules from non-believers who seem to enjoy reminding us of the controversial lifestyle choices, extravagant behaviors, and imbecilic statements of Church authorities? When Lord, will You make it end?”

By framing Habakkuk’s question in this fashion, I can now understand his being crestfallen as he looked upon the sufferings of his people. The nation of Israel was not an innocent victim being unjustly oppressed by a sinful nation. Israel too had sinned and her sins were actually worse than other nations because she is God’s chosen nation. She knew better, yet had rejected the God of her ancestors. The Church, like Israel, is also not an innocent victim. She too is filled with men and women who daily choose to spurn the eternal joy offered by God for the fleeting happiness of a “midnight rendezvous” with The World. Due to our connection as members of the Body of Christ, we cannot blame any other person for the state of the Church today. Like the people of Israel, we too have all made decisions which have further wounded the Church. And like Israel, we too should know better. Yet, unlike Israel, we still have an opportunity to repent and make amends. If we want a holier, prayerful Church, then we must choose ourselves to become holy and prayerful. Every day we stand at a crossroad, either we choose a life with God or we choose a life without Him. May God’s Holy Spirit strengthen us to choose His path, the road less traveled, more often than naught.