

## Why?

### Sermon for the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent (Invocavit)

Sermon Text: Job 2:1-13



*Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the Lord. <sup>2</sup> And the Lord said to Satan, "From where have you come?" Satan answered the Lord and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it." <sup>3</sup> And the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil? He still holds fast his integrity, although you incited me against him to destroy him without reason." <sup>4</sup> Then Satan answered the Lord and said, "Skin for skin! All that a man has he will give for his life. <sup>5</sup> But stretch out your hand and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face." <sup>6</sup> And the Lord said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your hand; only spare his life." <sup>7</sup> So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and struck Job with loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. <sup>8</sup> And he took a piece of broken pottery with which to scrape himself while he sat in the ashes. <sup>9</sup> Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die." <sup>10</sup> But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips. <sup>11</sup> Now when Job's three friends heard of all this evil that had come upon him, they came each from his own place, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. They made an appointment together to come to show him sympathy and comfort him. <sup>12</sup> And when they saw him from a distance, they did not recognize him. And they raised their voices and wept, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads toward heaven. <sup>13</sup> And they sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great.*

In recent years, you might get the feeling that Satan has been unleashed on the world because the last few years have been accompanied by a pandemic, war, horrible suffering in Iran and Afghanistan and now most recently, there are thousands of stories like Job's of people suffering greatly in Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran. We again see pictures of people who have lost everything, people who were in the prime of life and had to learn to make do with nothing in a matter of seconds. And the question that comes up is this: Why? This is a question that comes up at other times too, not just during these terrible events. It is a question we all face in one way or another. We even ask this question in many situations: "Why does God let this happen? And what does He want to show me through it?" These and similar questions have been asked since the beginning of humanity. Why does suffering happen? In the story of Job, this question becomes even more acute because here, it is clearly presented to us that it isn't just evil people who suffer, but also, and sometimes especially, believers.

The story of Job starts in heaven and goes something like this: unseen by all parties concerned, God speaks with Satan and God talks to Satan about Job. God is very pleased with this Job and told Satan that He was proud of Job. Satan wanted to challenge God's praise of Job. Satan knows the human heart very well and says to God, "He only worships You because You blessed him!" And he continued to say: "Job's love is not unconditional but based on a deal with God. Take everything that You have given him away and then we will see if he remains faithful." This is Satan's challenge. Then something unthinkable happens. God makes a deal with Satan. All of this happens behind the scenes. Job knew nothing about Satan's bet with God. Terrible things happened, the bad news that we know today comes to Job one after the other. Job lost so much in such a short time that anyone in the same situation has to think, something evil is at play here. And the question that involuntarily comes up is this: "What did I do wrong?" Or "Who caused this?" Job's response is unheard of – "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

The first thing that is presented to us in this story is the complete powerlessness of humanity. The story of Job teaches us humility. It shows us that we ultimately can't determine anything about our lives. And everyone is affected the same – poor and rich, believers and unbelievers – anything can be ripped away in the matter of a few terrible

moments. No one voluntarily chooses these evil times. What is more, we can't even look behind the scenes to see who is behind this. Suffering and bad fate must remain hidden to us. In Job's story, there is another dimension to suffering. Job isn't just hit hard by the fact that he lost all his possessions, he is hit especially hard by the fact that the suffering hits him physically. Actually, even after the first catastrophes failed to motivate Job into denying God, Satan once again made an appeal to God and said something like this: "Up to now, the suffering has only hit Job's possessions, but wait until something happens to him physically – then he will lose his faith!" Indeed, when your body is attacked, the whole person suffers... then it can happen quickly that bitterness and doubt spread. All this hits Job at once and he sat in his pile of ashes and scratched his sores. The disease was also contagious, so he was cut off from society and now he really only had his sores. The only thing that remained was his wife... and in this case, she appeared to be Satan's instrument. She encouraged him to deny God and even advised him to take his life. The devout Job rejects this advice as well. Contrary to all normal human understanding, Job never stops hoping. Later, he says these wonderful words that could have also come from the New Testament: "I know that my Redeemer lives! And I will see my God!" Despite his terrible situation, Job never stops believing in God's grace. And he not only wants to continue to believe in God, he wants his words to be written down as evidence of God's love. "I know that my Redeemer lives!" This should be proclaimed throughout the world and be effective against Satan's evidence. His words are similar to what Jesus cries out on the cross: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?" And then He confidently prays: "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit!" Job couldn't see Jesus yet. He couldn't see that God would stand beside miserable people in such a radical way. And yet, he knew this side of God. He was so convinced of God's love that he didn't let the terrible things with which Satan had tempted him, to affect him. But in good times and bad, he allowed God and His love to prevail. Job was convinced of this gracious side of God. In Jesus, this gracious side of God became man. For generations, people have found comfort in this Jesus again and again. We find comfort in this Jesus because Jesus isn't just anyone but the One who is God among us. Paul Claudel writes: "He didn't come to eliminate suffering, He didn't come to explain it, rather, He came to fill it with His presence."

Many tried to look behind the cross or tried to reinterpret it or tried to see a deeper meaning within it. But we only ever get the answers that God gives us in the Bible. He did all of this for us and for our sins. He did it so that we can live, so that fellowship between God and mankind can be restored. As we follow the story of Jesus' suffering this week, we are reminded again and again that Jesus' death was not a trivial matter or an evil fate that happened by chance, but the cross was a journey that Jesus endured because it was God's will. Satan was truly let loose on Jesus and God didn't set a limit, as He did with Job, as to what extent Satan could tempt Jesus. No, all the powers of hell were poured out on Jesus. In doing so, Jesus unequivocally placed Himself under our fate. He bears our hopelessness and being forsaken by God. And at the same time, He unites us with His victory. This can all be understood through a wonderful story by Elie Wiesel.

Elie Wiesel tells about the worst night of his life when his son was executed in a concentration camp. "I will never forget this night," he says. It seemed to him as if his entire life was trapped in a deep hell and there was no way out. Elie Wiesel reports that at the sight of his son's death, he heard the demons of hell screaming and they all cried: "Where is your God?" Elie Wiesel said that he was horrified to realize that it was not demons screaming like that at all, but his own heart. But then, something special came. Elie Wiesel said: "When I wanted to curse God, I heard God's voice saying: There is your God on the cross and He cries out... My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me." Yes, in the hell of our sin and our powerlessness and our doubt, God calls to us: "I'm standing by your side" – just as He stood by Job, so He stands by you forever. Jesus is the only one who can bring unity, the only one who can comfort, and the only one who can give hope. Amen.