

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This weekend we hear about the man born blind and how Jesus heals him. The very first spoken word in this Gospel is, “**Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?**” (John 9:2). Ahh, the problem of evil! This question always comes up. This question has been asked over and over again throughout the millennia! Why is there evil in the world? This question gets to the core and heart of our existence on this earth.

Some see physical evil (pain, suffering, sickness, death) as a direct and immediate result of moral evil (sin). This means that they believe someone gets sick because they *did something wrong*. For them, this is the only answer that makes sense – if God is all-good, all-powerful, and all-knowing, then any evil that happens to people (like being born blind) *must* be as result of the evil of a person – this man sinned or his parents did.

What are the results of this attitude? I’ve seen a few of results to this belief. One reaction is *superiority* and *judgment* over people who are suffering. When people live well and without suffering, they may *look down* on those who are suffering, seeing them as “sinners”. The logic goes that they *must deserve* what is happening to them – they must be evil or bad. Another result is that of the *Prosperity Gospel*. This line of thinking says that if I am faithful to God and do everything good (and I do mean “good” and not “well”), then God will bless me *in this life* with money and comfort and pleasures; things will go my way, and I’ll have little or no troubles.

What are the results of believing this (that physical evil is a direct and immediate result of moral evil) when that physical evil happens to “me”? I try to be good, but I’m not prospering the way I think I should. I get sick or a family member dies unexpectedly. The question comes up, “Why is this happening to me?” And then this common question: “*What did I do to deserve this?*” The assumption is that for this evil to happen to me, *I must have done something wrong*. The only other explanation is that *God is UNJUST*. This can lead to one of two results: I always feel guilty for something (which I may not have done), or I begin to resent God, hate Him, or even deny His existence.

This belief that physical evil (pain, suffering, sickness, death) is a result of moral evil (sin) doesn’t coincide with lived experience, and so doesn’t make sense.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus puts the lie to this line of thinking: “**Neither he nor his parents sinned; it is so that the works of God might be made visible through him**” (John 9:3). *There is another way!* The suffering of this world may not be part of the initial plan of God (see Adam and Eve *before* the Fall in the Garden of Eden), but God can AND DOES now use suffering for His glory.

We see this first and foremost in the life of Jesus Himself. Jesus was the most perfect man, the one who never sinned, yet He died a most cruel and horrific death. He endured this not because He sinned, but to show us His love for us. He experienced the depths of every pain and suffering we have ever experienced or ever will experience. He shows us that there can be meaning in suffering – meaning which shows forth love. Which is more loving, someone who says, “I love you, Baby; you make me feel so good,” or someone who says, “I love you so much I would die for you”? Obviously, the one who says, “I would die for you.” Which is more loving, someone who says, “I would die for you,” or someone who *actually* risks his life to save his beloved? Jesus didn’t just say, “I love you” nor did He say, “I would die for you,” He actually did it; He died for you and for me. He shows us, not in spite of His suffering, but BY HIS SUFFERING how much He loves us.

We do not believe in the “prosperity Gospel.” Those who have lived closest to Almighty God have been the ones who have endured poverty and suffering and brokenness the most – Mary, Joseph, and all the saints throughout the centuries. When we ask, “What did I do to deserve this?” we miss the point. We all have sinned, and receive less than we deserve. The question is, “Since I live in a broken world, where things do not, will not, cannot go the way *I want them to*, how will I make use of this suffering to show love to God and others?”