Evil and Suffering: Talk 2

Why Would a Loving God Permit suffering?

It is a mystery that has haunted mankind throughout the ages. The mystery of suffering, especially suffering in a world supposedly created by a loving God, has been explored in art, literature and many intellectual treatises but never satisfied outside of the Christian context. We have all experienced that suffering is part of human existence from birth to death and most everyone of us has suffered a variety of, psychological, social and spiritual sufferings.

God made it very clear that LOVE is the richest source of the meaning of this mystery of suffering. **Jn 15:13**“No greater love than this: to lay down one’s life for ones friends.”

True love is willing to suffer. Most people today who have trouble with suffering have a cross with no Christ on it. He showed that the Cross is total love! He came and he suffered with us. He transformed suffering into redemption and as we are still in the Easter Season, we remember that he made death consoling! Because of his resurrection we have the assurance and the great hope of heaven. Our loved ones and we will rise again to a new life!

The Resurrection gives us the hope needed to weather the mystery of suffering. Once we have reached Eternity we will look back on our life with incredible joy, seeing what all the sufferings did for our souls.

Even Ivan Karamazov, the Atheist in Brothers Karamazov, who questioned God’s existence because an innocent child suffered, understood what hope in the Resurrection brings. (\*\*Read from Peter Kreeft, Making Sense out of Suffering, pg. 139 , Ivan’s quote, ‘II believe like a child that all suffering will be healed and made up for…) The sad thing is he still rebelled. Even though he believed, he would not accept it.

Often one’s sinfulness leads directly to painful repercussions. A drinking binge leads to a hangover and angry harsh words can injure a friendship.

But not all suffering is punishment for wrongdoing.

Look at poor Job. His friends were convinced he’d done something wrong to incur God’s wrath but we all know that the innocent do suffer and that is why we are having this discussion. We see in a suffering child that suffering does not always connect to punishment.

“In the New Testament, Christ teaches the same truth by his Passion. The Lamb of God—who is entirely without fault—endured dejection, beating, taunting, flogging and crucifixion. By suffering himself he removed the moral stigma from suffering. No longer could it be said that personal sufferings always indicates moral failure.”

A Christian views suffering differently than the unbeliever because “he sees it and everything else as a ***between***, as existing between God and himself, as a gift from God, and invitation from God, a challenge from God, something between God and himself.” How else can one explain the joy that emanates from the Saints that suffered so intensely. Why did the Apostles who were flogged and in prison, leave for home filled with joy that they “could suffer for the sake of the name?”

“The mysterious suffering of innocent people that exists all around us, is a very great mystery indeed. But it is not the only mystery. For if we are to ask why there is suffering, why is there evil, then we must also ask: Why is there love, why is there beauty, why is there justice, and why do we yearn for these?”

The same God who allowed Job to suffer showed his hand to Job by summoning him to humility and trusting faith. Job keeps asking God “Why?” but gets no answer.

We have all seen many who are wicked suffer little, and many who are saintly suffer very much. Again the great mystery!

Maybe Isaiah 55:8–9 can help us:

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor your ways my ways,” declares the Lord. For as the heavens are exalted above the earth, so are my ways exalted above your ways and my thoughts above your thoughts.”

“Not only does God not answer Job, He more than implies that he does not owe

an explanation to Job, or to you, or to me. He is God, he is working his purposes out, purposes that we know very little of. Indeed, we might reasonably speculate that, if God were to give us an answer to the problem of suffering, and evil, we would not be able to understand the answer. We would only hear thunder.”

We often feel we are precious in God’s eyes, “that we are each unique and special. And while there is truth in this, it is also a truth that must be balanced with the fact that God sees a bigger picture, than my little world. I am part of a bigger plan. I have a place on a canvas, which has both light and darkness that exist in a kind of interplay that, for his own purposes, God permits.

Peter Kreeft says, “There is a kind of paradoxical serenity that comes to us from realizing that we see and know very little. In letting God be God, and letting go of our passion to control, and understand everything, there comes a kind of serenity.”

The mystery of suffering might just come down to this:

Do we trust God or not? Are we willing to be abandoned to the will of our Father God, our Creator, as Jesus, who WAS God, was abandoned to the Father’s will?

Why did he allow his Son to enter into time to suffer and die if suffering was not part of his plan? He gave us a free will so that we can freely chose to love him. We are NOT puppets. We have a body and a soul that compliment our free will.

According to nature, suffering is a result of sin—a punishment of sorts, but one that simply follows the logic of doing what God did not make us to do. He did not make us to sin but to know and love him! We were to be happy forever in the Garden and obeying God. Yet Adam and Eve fell from grace, and Sin entered the world.

Sin is going contrary to God’s will and sin is going against what God wants for us. He is the creator; the designer of our world and sin was not part of the original package. Sin is not what the designer wanted for us just like a car was meant to run on gas and will not work if sand is put into the car’ gas tank.

The Felix Culpa, “o happy fault”, used by St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas, that is sung at the Easter Vigil reminds us that God chooses to bring good out of evil rather than prevent evil from existing.

But we can’t forget that free will chose that original sin and that we can’t have free will without suffering!

If you have free will you can make good or bad choices. The bottom line is that it is a mystery but like any mystery, we can learn more and more about it—and it’s good to think that, when we get to heaven and can walk and talk and hug and laugh with Jesus, we will get to ask him and know better than we can ever know in this life why God permits suffering.

But rather than thinking about why God allowed sin and suffering in this world, think about what life would be like if God did NOT permit our Fall into sin, and, as a result, the suffering caused by sin.

Imagine if Adam and Eve—without any weaknesses or susceptibility to sin—freely chose to turn against God and side with the devil, and God just said…nothing. Whatever, no difference, no fall from grace, no change. If that is all our freedom is worth, then we could never be sons and daughters of God. We could never please God with good deeds, prayers, and faithfulness to his will. It is our freedom, which God loves and respects PROFOUNDLY, that makes our choices have real consequences.

If there were no consequences for doing the wrong thing, there would be no reward for doing the right thing—and worse: there would be nothing good and joyful about our love for God if there were not suffering associated with our turning away from Him. We’d just be like planets circling a star: Jupiter has to go around the sun—it’s not going to get a reward at the end of the world for having done so. It didn’t freely choose to remain faithful to its path around the solar system.

If we choose to participate in this great mystery of Suffering then we faithfully take up our daily crosses and offer them back to our loving Father just as Jesus taught us. We try daily to find God in the joys and sorrows of our day and we thus mysteriously share in Christ’s redemption. Our suffering too, IS redemptive and can be offered back to God for others as well as for ourselves.

The Saints were living witnesses that Grace comes from Suffering and suffering unites us to Jesus. If we think of how miserable the world has become lately with all the sufferings brought on by people apparent aversion to suffering, it seem obvious that true happiness is not gained by avoidance of suffering.

While it is true, that God is not irrational, as our Catholic teaching consistently asserts, nevertheless, his ways are often beyond our simple apprehension. Most of his ways lie hidden to us.

So in conclusion, God permits suffering because he mysteriously draws a greater good from it. Sometimes we can see God’s hand orchestrating some good from suffering and sometimes we cant. The catch is to unite the suffering to Christ’s and wait until eternity to get the answer.