

Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time  
February 23, 2020  
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### Reflection

Imagine if you were born without arms or legs.

Did you imagine a life without accomplishment, without purpose, without meaning, fulfillment or love? A life not worth living? Or did you imagine God's love and mercy at work, both through the care you received and the virtues you developed?

In the late 1950's, a drug called Thalidomide was prescribed to counter morning sickness in pregnant women. Many of the children within their wombs did not survive. The rest suffered a range of complications, including being born without limbs. I once had a funeral for a Thalidomide survivor who lived over 50 years. Paul became fluent in multiple languages, travelled widely, and worked as a translator. He inspired many with his cheerful attitude and the determination to achieve his dreams. The demands of care brought out the best in his parents and siblings. Renewed by faith and nourished by the sacraments, he thanked God for his life and all that he received. Instead of bitterness and despair, he showed forgiveness: for his mom, for himself, and even for God. Paul lived these words written by his namesake to the Corinthians: "For all things are yours...the world or life or death, the present or the future - all belong to you, and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God."

Lev 19:1-2, 17-18  
Ps 103  
1 Cor 3:16-23  
Mt 5:38-48

In today's Gospel, Jesus says "Do not resist an evildoer." The Law of Moses had revealed the demand for restraint in the face of injustice. Instead of massive retaliation, shock and awe, screaming for vengeance, the response was to be proportionate. "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." But the Sermon on the Mount completes Scripture with a demand for forgiveness. Jesus said, "Do not resist an evildoer," and then fulfilled these words on the Cross. He said, "if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also." Jesus told Peter to sheath his sword and then healed the ear of Malchus. "If anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give him your cloak as well. The soldiers cast lots to divide his garments. "If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them also the second mile." Jesus carried the cross to Calvary, and then climbed it to be cut by nails. "Give to everyone who begs from you." Jesus told the good thief, "Today you will be with me in paradise." "Do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you. Jesus told Mary, "Woman, behold, your son!" To John, "Behold, your mother!"

Forgiveness and love from the Cross led to the rising sun of the Resurrection, and the falling rain of grace. They impel us on our mission to those who are hostile, beginning with the shadows of our own conscience.

The psalm reminds us that, "It is the Lord who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy." In our fallen world, we all suffer various maladies. Jesus heals us, body and soul. The cure may await the Resurrection, when we will be restored with glorified bodies, agile, strong and perfect. We might then choose to bear the marks of our suffering as a testimony; like medals on our chest. Listen to these words of St. John Chrysostom: "For just as soldiers showing to the king the wounds they received in his battles, speak with confidence, so they, by a humble representation of their past sufferings for Christ, obtain whatever they ask of the king of heaven." The cure might not be until later, but the healing begins now; through faith that accepts the Cross that is given and bears it with hope.

People do suffer in this life, and there is a notion that not all lives are worth living. Our society made a choice for euthanasia and is now seeking to expand access. But Paul tells the Corinthians, "Do you not know that you are God's temple, and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person."

Misguided compassion wants to end suffering by ending life. But I've seen the value of suffering at the hospice. Patients there accept natural death as the final gift to an earthly life animated by grace. The world forgets the dignity of human life created in the image and likeness of God. But "the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God."

And this is what God told Moses in the first reading. "You shall reprove your neighbour, or you will incur guilt yourself." I encourage you to speak in favour of life from conception until natural death. This is not vengeance or a grudge. It is love: love that honours the sufferings of the saints.

Lent will soon begin, allowing us to share in this suffering in a small degree. The Church offers prayer, almsgiving and fasting as ways to come closer to God. On Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, abstain from meat and practice fasting. Fasting is for those aged 18 to 58. Eat no more than one full meal, plus two small meals that do not add up to a full meal: 1.9 meals. This too is love: love received from the sacrifice of Christ made present in the Eucharist that you are about to receive.