

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

²⁵For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at last he will stand upon the earth; ²⁶and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then from my flesh I shall see God, ²⁷whom I shall see on my side, and my eyes shall behold, and not another.”(Job 19:25-27)

This is a sermon that my wife Carol and I wrote together, only she did most of the writing. Carol has a taste for the obvious, which is sometimes lacking in me. In this case, the obvious thing is that Job longs for a Redeemer. And the Gospel is that he shall have Him!

This man Job is a passionate man. Two extraordinary cries burst forth from the heart of Job. The first speaks of his passionate love for God:

Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.(Job 13:15a, KJV)

Can there be a stronger expression of utter surrender to God than this? Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him!

The other extraordinary cry is the one before us this morning: Job’s conviction that one day he shall see his Redeemer:

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The footnote in the *New Jerusalem Bible* expresses well the drama of Job’s cry concerning his Redeemer:

Job’s faith thus momentarily defies horizons of mortality in his desperate need for justice; it prepares us for the explicit revelation of bodily resurrection.

The other night, Carol and I went to see the movie “American Gangster.” It was based on a true story that took place during the Vietnam War when American troops were in Thailand. But the movie was set in the New York metropolitan area. The American Gangster, a part played by Denzel Washington, was a big time drug dealer named Frank Lucas. He was getting heroin directly from Thailand

and selling it on the streets of New York City. The corruption that enabled him to do this was everywhere. He was even able to use military transports to get the stuff from Thailand to the US. Cops and detectives in NYC were turning a blind eye in return for a percentage of the profits. Even the Mafia was involved, though they really didn’t like Frank Lucas because he was an African American, not Italian, and because he sold better dope for less and was ruining the competition. In any case this drug dealer made a lot of money.

But then he came up against a good cop – Richie Roberts, played by Russell Crowe. Richie was unpopular amongst the police because everyone knew that he refused to take a bribe. This made him untrustworthy in a time and a place where bribes were a fairly ordinary part of life. He was an honest man who always tried to do the right thing. He wasn’t perfect, but he was good.

It was a satisfying movie because the good guy won in the end. You may want to see it so I won’t tell you any more. I like it when the good guys win; when vindication comes to those who have been wronged, and the really bad guys get what’s coming to them. In the movies it’s often pretty black and white – it’s pretty clear who is good and who is bad. In real life things are more ambiguous.

Job was a good guy. The LORD even said so in the beginning of the book of Job. He was righteous and God was proud of him and held him up as an example – “have you seen my servant Job?” Job was also very prosperous – he was a rich and highly respected member of the community. So Satan – or the Accuser – suggests that Job is good and righteous because he can afford to be, but take away all that he has and then see what he does. God agrees to Satan’s test - certain that Job will remain faithful no matter what happens to him.

And so the story of Job raises the very human question, “Why do bad things happen to good people?” It’s a question that many have tried to answer. Job’s friends insist that if you are good and righteous you will be rewarded and that if you are

bad and a sinner you will be punished. It's as simple as that, they say, so Job must have done something to offend God and that is why he is suffering so.

Throughout the discourse, Job clings to his innocence, his integrity, and his righteousness before God. Why God has removed his favor from him he doesn't know, but he insists that it is not because of anything he has done wrong. Once he felt that he was close to God and he conducted himself as a Godly man – he fed the hungry, took care of widows and orphans, was generous and hospitable to strangers, and he was just in his dealing with everyone. But now he feels estranged and alienated from God. He doesn't know why God has abandoned him.

Job's experience is all too familiar to many of us. Bad things happen and we ask why? What did I do to deserve this? Where is God now? Why does it seem that God is far away and is not listening to my prayers? We have the testimony of some of the great saints of the church that they experienced this same kind of estrangement and alienation from God. St. John of the Cross speaks of the dark night of the soul. Mother Theresa, who lived in our time, claimed that the God who felt close and very present with her when she was younger, left her feeling abandoned even as she continued to pour out her life for the poorest people of India. Others have spoken of a powerful sense of God's absence in times of trial and trouble – still they held onto the conviction that God had not abandoned them and that one day they would enjoy the comfort of God's presence again.

Like Job. In the midst of terrible suffering and abandonment Job proclaims his persistent hope that one day he will be vindicated and once again he will enjoy the comfort of God's favor and presence. That is our text for today – “I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth ... and then in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see on my side...” Job's proclamation is full of hope for someone who will take his side. All of his friends accuse him of wrongdoing. No one believes that Job could be suffering unjustly. They all stand against him and no one believes him. Job is looking for someone who will come to his defense – then he will be vindicated and his relationship with God will be restored.

We hear these words of Job and immediately think of Jesus – he is the Redeemer for whom Job hopes. But of course Job knew nothing of Jesus and he also knew nothing of the resurrection – for Jesus had not risen from the dead yet! It would be centuries before Jesus of Nazareth would live and die and rise again from the dead. Still, Job has put his finger on a hope – a longing – that exists in the human heart. It is

a longing for meaning and for answers in the face of suffering and troubles. We all need a Redeemer – we all need someone who will take our side and stand with us and be our defender – we all need to be restored to intimacy with God our Father and our creator.

The one we need – our Redeemer and our defender – is Jesus Christ, our risen Lord. That he lives now, having defeated sin and death – our greatest enemies, means that we have him even now to defend and redeem us.

In this morning's Gospel Lesson we see Jesus defending the doctrine of the resurrection. He does so in full face of the Sadducees, who opposed the doctrine and considered it a corruption of the faith of Israel. To listen to Jesus debate the Sadducees, you might be led to think that Jesus is making a profound, but abstract theological point: that God is the God of the living, not of the dead. But something more is going on here. This Jesus who debates with the Sadducees is the same Jesus who is on his path toward Golgotha. This is the Jesus who means to pay the price that God shall indeed be the God of the living. Why, he is off to die, that we might live! He is off toward the Cross that he might indeed be our Redeemer.

Now, as we turn to the Blessed Sacrament, let's ponder this spectacular truth: the Redeemer for whom Job longed promises now, with his body and his blood and his whole heart, that he shall be *your* Redeemer too. He shall redeem not just Job, not just the apostles, not just the saints, but also you and me – struggling, imperfect, hopeful, befuddled, frail people that we are, but people Jesus counts precious, counts his own. To this Redeemer be the glory, along with the Father and the Holy Spirit now and forever. Amen.