



Dolorosa

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A STEP BACK IN TIME

THE WIFE OF JOB

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When someone displays unconquerable endurance through all sorts of trials, annoyances, and provocations, we say that such a person has “the patience of Job.”

Through the years, this expression has become synonymous with perseverance in the face of overwhelming hardships. It has become so common that it is employed not only by Catholics and Protestants, but even by persons who have no idea who Job (pronounced *Jōb*) was. The expression marks the Biblical figure Job as a magnanimous model of patience—a plateau he truly reached.

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Job was born in Hus, a land which was in the northern part of the Arabian desert. He truly loved and served God, avoiding evil and doing good. Job was generous, kind, and faithful to his fellow man and thus earned the esteem of all. God blessed Job with great wealth and many possessions; more importantly, He blessed him with a loving family: a wife and ten children. Job’s life was

thus a simple one, filled with love, joy, and peace.

One day, as we read in the first chapter of the Book of Job, an interesting conversation occurred between God and the devil. Satan explained that he had gone throughout the world to tempt and win many souls for hell. Hearing this, God asked the devil: “Have you seen my servant Job? There is no one like him on earth. He is simple and upright; a man who fears God and avoids evil” (cf. Job 1:8).

In *Dramatic Stories of the Bible*, Father Thomas D. Williams relates Satan’s response in these words:

“Yes, Job serves you faithfully, and You have paid him well for it. See how prosperous, strong and happy he is, rich, respected, the head of a happy family, with all that his heart can desire. Why would he not serve You, when his obedience brings so much good to him?” (161)

The devil then issued a challenge to Almighty God. “Take it all away,” he said. “Take away all You have given Job: his family, his possessions, his position. Then, we’ll see if he doesn’t curse You” (cf. Job 1:11).

God accepted Satan’s challenge. “Fine,” God said. Then, because the devil cannot do anything without divine permission, He added: “Behold, I give you power over all that Job has. Do as you wish. But, do not touch his person” (cf. Job 1:12).

Soon after this meeting between God and Satan, Job lost everything in a series of devastating tragedies. One day, a messenger came and informed him that an enemy tribe had stolen all his cattle, killing his servants in the process. While this man delivered his message, another messenger arrived on the scene. “The fire of God fell from heaven,” he cried out, “and striking the sheep and the servants, hath consumed them, and I alone have escaped to tell thee” (Job 1:16). Then, another servant came and announced to Job the news that the Chaldeans stole all his camels and killed their keepers.

Job listened patiently as the messengers came one by one with news of one misfortune after another. But, he was still to receive more and worse news. Moments after hearing about the death of his camel-keepers, another messenger brought the saddest news of all. “Thy sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in the house of their elder brother,” the servant said, “[when] a violent wind came on a sudden from the side of the desert, and shook the four corners of the house, and it fell upon thy children and they are dead, and I alone have escaped to tell thee” (Job 1:18-19).

And so in just one day in a matter of hours, Job was bereft of his children, his servants, his riches. If it is true, as the saying goes, that “when it rains, it pours,” then Job was stuck in the middle of a relentless monsoon. But, how did he react in the face of these tragic events? Did he yield to self-pity? Did he curse God, as Satan hoped he would? No! Job was bigger than that; he was a magnanimous man. Yes, he was sad. He grieved for the loss of his children and his other misfortunes, but, resigned to God’s Will, Job did what all Catholics should do when faced with trial, tragedy,

and sorrow—he bowed down before God without a single word of rebellion. Instead, he uttered these sublime words of faith in God and of submission to His holy Will: “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: as it hath pleased the Lord so is it done: blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21).

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After these events had come to pass, God again spoke to the devil. As is related by Father Thomas Williams, God said to Satan:

“I have permitted you to afflict my servant Job most grievously; yet he has remained faithful to Me. In sorrow and adversity, as well as in gladness and prosperity, he serves Me loyally, not so much for what I have given him, as for Myself.”

But Satan answered: “There is yet another trial You have not given him. A man will sacrifice everything for his life, and for bodily health and peace. Strike him with pain and disease, make him weak and helpless and suffering; then You will see how soon his faith and trust and loyalty will die out.” (162)

So, God again gave the devil permission to try Job. “Behold he is in thy hand,” God said, “but yet save his life” (Job 2:6). In other words, do what you want, but do not kill him.



“The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: as it hath pleased the Lord so is it done: blessed be the name of the Lord.”

The devil therefore went forth and struck Job with a gruesome disease of the skin. Father Thomas Williams gives us a rather vivid description of what afflicted Job. He writes:

All over him broke out fetid sores; his body was covered as with a terrible ulcer that ate away the flesh; the limbs were swollen and covered with a thick scab or crust; the face was bloated, the eyes were dim, the voice feeble. And with this a racking pain, that permitted him no rest day or night. (162-163)

So sickening was the appearance of his plagued body and so unbearable was the odor, that Job had to leave his home. He found refuge outside the city walls in the common dumping ground where the refuse of the city was burnt. There, he took up his place upon a dunghill and grieved over his present circumstances, but not once did he utter a word against God or complain about God's providence.

While all this was going on, Job's wife was becoming more and more bitter towards Almighty God and angry with her husband. She suffered almost as much as Job did. Except for her health, she, too, lost everything: her children, her home, and her possessions. However, her attitude was quite the opposite of Job's. Rather than embrace the Will of God, Job's wife reacted to the adversity in the way the devil had hoped Job would react. She lost her confidence in God and grew angry with Him for permitting such misfortunes to befall her. And, she insisted that Job do the same.

On a certain day, she went to speak with her husband. Instead of comforting Job and encouraging him to persevere, like a good wife would have done, she taunted him and thereby added to his sorrow. "See what you get for placing your trust in God?" she said to him. "How long will you persist in your simplicity? Bless God now and die" (cf. Job 2:9). In other words, "God does not care about you. Throw in the towel. Give up and call it a day."

Hearing his beloved wife speak such cruel words about God's loving providence, Job cast a disapproving glance in her direction. At length, he broke the silence and offered a gentle rebuke. "Thou hast spoken like one of the foolish women," he said. Continuing, he attempted to teach her a valuable lesson. "If we have received good things at the hand of God," he said, "why should we not receive evil?" (Job 2:10) It is as though Job was telling his wife in a subtle way: "Get a grip on yourself. God is in control, and He will fix everything when it pleases Him."

It is not recorded how Job's wife responded to these words, but she remained with him throughout his illness and, no doubt, took care of him. At length, God



rewarded Job's faith and patience. He healed Job's body and restored to him double the riches he had lost, and He blessed Job with seven more sons and three daughters. Father Williams tells us that

Job lived after these things, prosperous and happy, a hundred and forty years; leaving to posterity an example of faith, hope, and patience, that has made his name honored in all ages. (166)

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Throughout the pages of the Old and New Testaments, numerous people, about whom not much is known, arrive on the scene. These persons often play a small role and, at times, teach an important lesson, but then they disappear almost as quickly as they appeared. Job's wife is one of those persons. Sacred Scripture makes no mention of her name, her family history, nothing. Her claim to fame, or rather, infamy, is her bitterness towards God and her taunting of Job—not qualities for which one would want to be known.

However, the reaction of Job's wife to her sorrows and hardships is characteristic of many people today, and, sadly, even of some Catholics. A few years ago, I remember going to a hospital to anoint a lady who was dying of cancer. She was a wife and mother. The family did not attend our chapel but desired the traditional rite of Extreme Unction. After I had finished administering the sacrament, the husband asked to speak with me for a few minutes. "Father," he said, "I'm having a very hard time

with this. Why is God taking her? Why is He making her suffer like this? What did she do to deserve this? Why is He going to make my children suffer without a mother?"

Answering such questions is never an easy thing, especially in the given case. What made it even more difficult was that the man asked these questions not merely out of grief, but with a slight amount of resentment towards God, for he later added: "How can I continue praying to a God Who allows something like this?"

I sympathized with the man's heartbreaking situation and offered what words of comfort I could in an attempt to gently move him to resign himself to God's Will and to cultivate a greater trust in Divine Providence. I hope that God used my words to help him, even as I pray for the man and his family daily.

In our world, situations like this are not uncommon. We are weak creatures with a fallen human nature. Our bodies bleed when they are wounded; our hearts bleed tears when they are cut by sorrow and trial. This difficulty is often increased by the fact that we typically do not understand why certain things happen to us and to those we love: why we suffer, why our loved ones die, why life can, at times, seem so unfair. It is often at such times that the "Job's wife" we all have in us will tempt us to question God. Such thoughts, however, are nothing more than temptations to doubt God and His goodness and love.

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In the Book of Job, God raises some profound questions for Job to reflect upon in order to give him a greater understanding that He has planned things from all eternity and that man does not know everything. "Where were you," God asks, "when I laid the foundations of the earth? Have you entered into the depths of the sea and walked in its lowest parts? Did you know that you would be born? Do you know how long you shall live? Can you bring forth day and night?" (cf. Job 38-39)

By offering these questions for Job's reflection, God is simply telling him that there is purpose and meaning for everything He does and that He sees the big picture, whereas we only see tiny parts—and blurry parts at that. And so, we must be ever mindful that though we may not understand it in this life, there is a plan for everything that happens. This idea is beautifully expressed by a certain poet.

Life's Weaving

My life is but a weaving
Between my God and me;
I may not choose the colors,
He knows what they should be
For He can view the pattern
Upon the upper side,
While I can see it only
On this, the under side.

Sometimes He weaveth sorrow,
Which seemeth strange to me;
But I will trust His judgment,
And work on faithfully;
'Tis He Who fills the shuttle,
He knows just what is best;
So I shall weave in earnest
And leave Him with the rest.

At last, when life is ended,
With Him I shall abide,
Then I may view the pattern
Upon the upper side;
Then I shall know the reason
Why pain with joy entwined,
Was woven in the fabric
Of life that God designed.

With this in mind, let us strive to resign ourselves always and in all things to God's all-permissive Will, confident that He loves us more than anything else that He ever created and that He will only permit what is best for our souls and for the spiritual welfare of those we love.

When our inner Job's wife begins to taunt us and to tempt us to doubt God's loving providence or to give in to self-pity, let us calmly rebuke her as Job did. To do this, let us turn our mind from the doubt, as we would from other temptations, and renew our confidence in God with a little prayer. We can pray in our own words or we can pray in the words of Job: "As it hath pleased the Lord so is it done: blessed be the name of the Lord."

No matter what happens then to us or to our loved ones, no matter what hardships we face, may we, like Saint Paul, press on towards the eternal mark. "In the world," Our Lord said, "you shall have distress" (John 16:33). In other words, life is not going to be heaven on earth; there will be times when it will be really hard. Our Divine Savior warned us of this. "But have confidence," He added, "I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). With His grace, then, and our perseverance and trust in Him, we will make it through this valley of tears, and we, too, will overcome the world.