

In Jesus the Redeemer, Divine Providence Overcomes Evil

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General Audience

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In the previous catechesis we dealt with the question posed by people in every age concerning divine Providence, in the face of evil and suffering. God's word luminously and conclusively states: "against the wisdom (of God), evil does not prevail" (Wis 7:30). It indicates that God permits evil in the world for higher ends, but does not will it. Today we desire to listen to Jesus Christ who offers the full and complete answer to this tormenting question, in the context of the paschal mystery.

Let us reflect first of all on the fact that St. Paul announced Christ crucified as "the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor 1:24), in whom salvation is granted to believers. Certainly, his power is marvelous if it is manifested in the weakness and humiliation of the passion and death of the Cross. It is a sublime wisdom, unknown outside divine revelation. In God's eternal plan, and in his providential action in human history, every evil, and in particular moral evil-sin-is subjected to the good of the redemption and salvation precisely through the cross and resurrection of Christ. It can be said that in him God draws forth good from evil. He does it in a certain sense from the very evil of sin, which was the cause of the suffering of the Immaculate Lamb and of his terrible death on the cross as a victim for the sins of the world. The Church's liturgy does not hesitate even to speak, in this regard, of the "happy fault" [\[1\]](#) pan style.

Thus a definitive answer cannot be given to the question about the reconciliation of evil and suffering with the truth of divine Providence, without reference to Christ. On the one hand, Christ, the Incarnate Word, confirmed through his own life-in poverty, humiliation and toil-and especially through his passion and death, that God is with every person in his suffering. Indeed God takes upon himself the multiform suffering of man's earthly existence. At the same time Jesus Christ reveals that this suffering possesses a redemptive and salvific value and power. That "imperishable inheritance" of which St. Peter spoke in his first letter is prepared through this suffering: "an imperishable inheritance kept in

heaven for you" (1 Pet 1:4). The truth of Providence acquires, through the "power and wisdom" of the cross of Christ, its definitive eschatological sense. The definitive answer to the question about the presence of evil and suffering in our earthly existence is offered by divine revelation in the perspective of "predestination in Christ," in the perspective of man's vocation to eternal life, to participation in the life of God himself. Christ has provided this answer, confirming it by his cross and resurrection.

In this way everything, even the evil and suffering present in the created world, and especially in human history, are subjected to that inscrutable wisdom, concerning which St. Paul exclaimed in rapture: "O the depths of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and inscrutable his ways..." (Rom 11:33). In the whole context of salvation, it is that "wisdom against which evil does not prevail" (Wis 7:30). It is a wisdom full of love, since "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son..." (Jn 3:16).

The apostolic writings occupy themselves precisely with this wisdom, rich in compassionate love for the suffering, in order to help the afflicted to recognize God's grace. Thus St. Peter wrote to the Christians of the first generation: "In this you rejoice, though now for a little while you may have to suffer various trials" (1 Pet 1:6). He added: "So that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold which though perishable is tested by fire, may redound to praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet 1:7). These last words refer to the Old Testament, particularly to the Book of Sirach in which we read: "For gold is tested in the fire, and acceptable men in the furnace of humiliation" (Sir 2:5). Taking up again the same idea of testing, Peter continued in his letter: "But rejoice in so far as you share in Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed" (1 Pet 4:13).

The apostle St. James expressed himself in a similar way when he exhorted Christians to face up to trials with joy and patience: "Count it all joy, my brethren when you meet various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect in you" (Jas 1:2-4). Finally, in the Letter to the Romans, St. Paul compared human and cosmic sufferings to a kind of "groaning in travail" of the whole creation, emphasizing the "inward groaning" of those "who have the first fruits of the Spirit" and wait for the fullness of adoption, that is, "the redemption of our bodies" (cf. Rom 8:22-23). But he added: "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him..." (Rom 8:28) and: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword? (Rom 8:35). Finally, he concluded: "For I am sure that neither death, nor life...nor anything else in creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:38-39).

Alongside the fatherhood of God, the divine pedagogy also appears, manifested by divine Providence: "It is the discipline (paideia, that is, education) that you have to endure. God

is treating you as sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?... God disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness" (Heb 12:7, 10).

Suffering, therefore, viewed with the eyes of faith, even if it can still appear as the most obscure aspect of man's destiny on earth, permits us to see the mystery of divine Providence contained in Christ's revelation, and in particular, in his cross and resurrection. Doubtlessly it can still happen that while asking himself the age-old questions on evil and suffering in a world created by God, man may not find an immediate answer, especially if he doesn't have a living faith in the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ. Gradually, however, with the help of faith nourished by prayer, he discovers the true meaning of suffering which everyone experiences in his own life. It is a discovery which depends on the word of divine revelation and on the "word of the Cross" (cf. 1 Cor 1:18) of Christ, which is "the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor 1:24). As the Second Vatican Council stated: "Through Christ and in Christ, the riddles of sorrow and death grow meaningful. Apart from his Gospel, they overwhelm us" (GS 22). If through faith we discover this power and this "wisdom," we are on the salvific path of divine Providence. The meaning of the Psalmist's words are confirmed:

"The Lord is my shepherd... Even though I walk in the dark valley I fear no evil: for you are at my side" (Ps 23:1, 4).

In this way divine Providence is revealed as God walking alongside man.

In conclusion, the truth about Providence, which is intimately connected with the mystery of creation, must be understood in the context of the whole of revelation, of the whole creed. Thus one sees that the revelation of the "predestination" (praedestinatio) of man and of the world in Christ, the revelation of the whole economy of salvation and its realization in history, enter organically into the truth of Providence. The truth of divine Providence is also closely linked to the truth of the kingdom (cf. Mt 6:33; cf. Lk 12:31). The truth about divine Providence, about God's transcendent government of the created world, becomes intelligible in the light of the truth about the kingdom of God, about that kingdom which God has eternally intended to realize in the created world on the basis of the "predestination in Christ" who is "the first-born of all creation" (Col 1:15).

1 «felix culpa»; cf. Exsultet of the Easter Vigil Liturgy