

Session for a prayer group at St. Brother Albert Polish Mission
Participants are asked to read the Book of Job in advance.
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Why do bad things happen to good people? – based on The Book of Job.

1. Opening Prayer

Lord, we acknowledge your presence among us. Help us understand why innocent and just people suffer. Only you, Almighty Lord, can guide us and walk us through this question. Please, Lord, send your Spirit upon us, and open our ears, our eyes, and our hearts, as we struggle to find comfort and answer by reading and studying The Book of Job. This we ask through Christ Our Lord - Amen.

2. Introduction to the Book of Job.

- We can find it in a section of Wisdom Books in the Old Testament. The main reason for writing the wisdom books was to give to people of Israel an instruction of the proper ways of living in accordance to the tradition and God's law. Most of the authors of wisdom books were teaching that success and happiness in life were evidence of the wisdom of the person who succeeded, and that is was a reward from God for keeping His law.
- The Book of Job was written somewhere between the 6th and the 5th centuries BC. At that time Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem, and a lot of Israelites were deported. About 50 years later they were allowed to come back, but they were still under foreign domination. Questions arose between Israelites as to why God let this happen if they obeyed His law?
- The book has a form of a dramatic poem. It talks about unjustified suffering of

innocent people. The story is written by more than one author, and it talks about a man named Job. The purpose of the book is didactic.

3. **Who is Job?**

- This is a fascinating story based on folk-tale about a life of Job. He was a very just, righteous man, always supporting the needy and poor people. He lived in accordance with God's Law. His happiness was full, he had a wonderful family, was rich, and had a good position in the city. Suddenly, he loses everything: his property, his children, and a terrible disease afflicts his body. Here the drama begins.

4. **Job's Three Friends.**

- We have to remember that the Israelites are still under foreign domination. The question of why all those bad things happened to them has only one answer: people deserved it since they have sinned.

- Job's friends are defending God. His friends come, but do not offer him a consolation. They are telling Job that his misfortune is a punishment from God for his sins. They are asking him to repent. (Job 22,21)

5. **Job's answer to his friends**

- Author of this part of the book is in a way writing a parody of the prophets and teachers, who are trying to assure Israelites that everything will be OK, as long as they turn to God and repent.

- Job does not agree with the theory of his friends. He knows that he has lived a good and just life. He feels innocent of any wrongdoing (like people of Israel felt). He says that what happened to him is unjustified, and he is blaming God for all his suffering. One thing is very important: that Job in his accusation never diminishes his

devotion to God. Job calls God to hear his case, to give him an answer and the cause of his misery.

6. What did God tell Job?

- God comes to Job in the midst of a storm and talks to him.
- God does not answer the question directly, but by way of questioning Job, makes him to realize that there is so much going on in nature and human life, that it is impossible for Job to fully understand everything.
- He asks Job: "Who is this that obscured divine plans with words of ignorance?" (Job 38,1-3), "Where were you when I founded the earth?" (Job 38,4-7)
- God refers in his speech to his almighty power. He is the Creator of everything. His is everywhere, always in every aspect of Job's life and everyone's life.
- He makes a point to Job that he is the Wisdom and Justice, no one can find a way to that, only God.
- God in his speech criticized the three friends, who even though in good faith, made false charges against Job. God knows that Job is a righteous man.

7. What is the response from Job?

- "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be hindered. I have dealt with great things that I do not understand; things too wonderful for me, which I cannot know. I had heard of you by word of mouth, but now my eye has seen you. Therefore I disown what I have said, and repent in dust and ashes." (Job 42,2-6)
- Job accepts the words of God. He recovers his attitude of trust in God. He understands from God's speech that success and happiness are not rewards for a right way of living, and that suffering is not a punishment from God for his sins. He acknowledges his power and his wisdom.

8. Conclusion of the story of Job

- We talked at the beginning that the Book of Job had more than one author. First author ends the legendary story with God finding Job faithful after he tested him, but does not reunite Job with his family or friends. It would be hard to accept this ending by the people of Israel. It would be against their beliefs.
- The second author adds a happy end – an epilogue to the story - "Lord even gave to Job twice as much as he had before." After Job accepts what happened to him in the light of God's power, and a mystery of God, and stands silent before him – God restores his life. This ending was needed to reassure the people of Israel that their God after all, is a merciful God, who will take care of his people, as he promised.
- It is possible that, if there would not be a happy ending, we would not even know about the book today.
- Also an author of the book wanted to keep the harmony with the folk-tale, which the Book of Job originated from.

9. What can we learn from Job?

- We have to remember that Job in his deepest suffering never questioned God's existence. He is arguing with God not because he is looking for recompense, but because he believes in the justice of God. He is thinking of God as his only real, and wise friend. His faithfulness should be an encouragement to us.
- For me Job's case is a proof that suffering is not a sign of sin, like some people are trying to tell us even these days. Based on the readings of the Book of Job, we have to remember that God is with us always, even in our suffering. He never leaves us alone. We can learn from the book, that if we meet people who suffer, we should not

put blame on them, or try to find an answer to it in their way of life. We have to give them support and assurance that they are not alone.

10. Is there an answer in the Book of Job to our question?

- Suffering of innocent will be always a mystery to us. There is never right, full answer to that. We can try to blame other people, or the accidents that happen, or even God?
- We should rather ask ourselves not why those things happen, but how do we deal with them when they happen? Are we able to forgive, and love our enemies? Do we still love our God even when bad things are happening to us? Do we recognize in our pain and misery the presence of our God, his divine love for us? If we can do that, then we should also see that our ability to forgive and to love others is a tool from God, to enable us to live in this world. Our faith in Jesus Christ (Job is often compared to Christ), His unconditional love for us, gives us strength to overcome the pain and suffering, and allows us to look with hope and trust into the future.

11. Closing prayer.

- Lord we thank you for the time you have spent together with us today. We know that you are always with us. You are there when we need you. Your hand is always stretched to us. Let us never forget about you. In happy times, and in times of trial, let us feel your presence. Let us feel your endless love for us .We want to be a consolation to those who need you. Lord, we want to praise your name forever as the psalmist did “May all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you. May those who long for your help always say: The Lord be glorified” (Ps 40,17). Amen