

Why Suffering?

March 19, 2011

The latest dramatic shifting of tectonic plates off the east coast of Japan, causing both inland the biggest earthquake Japan has known for many years and along its eastern coast an absolutely devastating tidal wave, must be raising in many minds the classic question: if God exists, if he is all-powerful and all-good, how can he possibly allow so much human suffering? The classic answer is not too difficult in theory, at any rate when one is not suffering oneself! –

Firstly, suffering is often a punishment for sin. God does exist, sin does offend him. Sin takes souls to Hell whereas God created them for Heaven. If suffering on earth will put a brake on sin and help souls to choose Heaven, then God, who is certainly in command of the tectonic plates, can without difficulty use them to punish sin. Then were the Japanese people especially sinful? Our Lord himself tells us not to ask that question, but rather to think of our own sins and to do penance, otherwise “you will all likewise perish” (Lk. XIII, 4). Would it not be astonishing if there were no Japanese people now wondering whether Western-style materialism and comfort are really what life is all about?

Secondly, human suffering can well be a warning, to turn men away from evil and keep them from pride. Right now the whole godless West should be questioning its own materialism and prosperity. By the steadily increasing rate of earthquakes and other natural disasters all over the world over the last several years, the Lord God is certainly trying to get the attention of all of us, maybe in the hope that he will not have to inflict on us the worldwide “rain of fire” of which his Mother warned us at Akita (in Japan) in 1973. But right now, is there not every likelihood that because they are doing the suffering, the Japanese are profiting more from their disaster than is the distant West? Those countries may in fact

be lucky which are getting now a foretaste of the Chastisement threatening to come.

Thirdly, God may use human suffering to highlight the virtue of his servants. That was the case with Job, and with Christian martyrs down all the ages. Few Japanese people may today have supernatural faith, but if the Japanese now humble themselves beneath what they sense to be the mighty hand of God, they will earn natural merit and at least on the natural level give him glory.

Finally, there is God's own answer to Job, who by Chapter 36 of his Book is still not satisfied with any explanation for his suffering that he or any of his family or friends have been able to come up with. I paraphrase: "Where were you, Job, when I laid down the foundations of the earth? Did you design the tectonic plates? Who do you think keeps the sea normally within its bounds, and stops it from flooding dry land? Can you really think I did not have my own good reasons to let it just now wash over the north-east coast of Japan?" See the Book of Job, Chapters 38 and 39. And Job at last submits. He is satisfied with the answer, and confesses that he was wrong to be calling in question the wisdom and goodness of God (Job 42, 1-7).

Let us ourselves do penance, be warned by Japan's disaster, hope to give glory to God in our own trials to come, and recognize above all that God alone is God!

Kyrie eleison.