

February 4, 2018
5TH Sunday, Year B

Suffer the little children

Tearfully recalling being forced to search for food from garbage and to sleep outside on cardboard mats; Glyzelle Palomar, 12, had a simple but profound question for Pope Francis. *"Why did God let this happen to us?"*

Speaking in Manila in 2015 in front of 30,000 young people, Glyzelle told of children being neglected by their parents and how many were caught up in a world of drugs and prostitution.

"Why is God allowing such things to happen, even if it is not the fault of the children? And why are there only very few people helping us?"

Glyzelle's question visibly affected Pope Francis. Putting aside his prepared speech, he responded to the young girl. *"The nucleus of your question almost doesn't have a reply. Only when we too can cry about the things that you said are we able to come close to replying to that question. Certain realities in life we only see through eyes that are cleansed through our tears."*

The Book of Job is an attempt to answer what causes suffering and pain; yet none of Job's answers fully satisfy his questions. Today's first reading expresses Job's lament in the midst of pain and suffering.

Life on earth is nothing more than forced labour; time is spent in nothing better than hired drudgery. Like a slave, sighing for the shade, or the labourer with no thought but for his wages, months of delusion I have assigned to me, nothing for myself but nights of grief. Lying in bed I wonder 'When will it be day?' Risen I think, 'How slowly evening comes!' Restlessly I fret till twilight falls. Swifter than a weaver's shuttle my days have passed, and vanished, leaving no hope behind. Remember that my life is but a breath, my eyes will never again see joy.

We ourselves contribute much suffering and evil in the world by the abuse of our freedom. Freedom is a God-given gift which we can either use with love or abuse. When freedom is abused, it is so often the innocent like Glyzelle and so many others, who suffer most.

The only answer we Christians have to the mystery of suffering is Jesus Christ. Through him we come to realise that suffering is not part of God's plan for creation, and that God is as repulsed by human suffering as we are. Jesus spent his life, and ultimately gave his life, to alleviate suffering.

As Christians we cannot explain the reality of suffering; nor can we take it all away. We can ensure that our eyes are open to it and that our hearts and hands are ready to tackle it. As his disciples, we are required to *"touch the suffering flesh of Christ in others"* and to heal it as best we can. (The Joy of the Gospel, 24, 270)

