

## **“Almighty love in sufferings”**

**Based on Job 38:1-11, 2 Cor 6:1-3, Mark 4:35-41**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

You have heard this cry. Perhaps you have cried out yourself. Why? Why did God allow this to happen? Why did that young and loving family have four miscarriages one after another? Why did those teenagers die in car crash?

Why do so many suffer from Covid in India and Nepal? Why are Christian villages burned, men slaughtered and women raped in Nigeria? Why totalitarian regime in North Korea can go on killing thousands and thousands of their own?

Why? Why? Why? I am sure each one of you could contribute with many other vivid and painful examples of sufferings where we struggle to make any sense. Not to forget Job from today's OT reading, or Paul from our NT reading.

There is an interesting thing. One of my professors brought it to my attention. Did you know that only a select group of people ask this question – why? Can you guess who are those people? Those are the people who have grown up in so called Christendom, in our Christianity based Western culture.

People with Eastern backgrounds don't ask that question. They know the answer. Karma. Bad karma. “Maybe they will get luckier in their next life.” Muslim people don't ask this question either. They know the answer.

Their god is absolute sovereign and he does what he does. Period. People in dualistic religions (those who believe that there exist two equally strong forces – good and evil), or those in animistic religions (those who believe that the world is ruled by good and evil spirits) – they don't ask that question.

They know the answer. Evil won. Period. But why do people who have grown up in Christian culture, but may not be practicing Christians themselves, why do they ask this question? Because of how the Triune God has revealed Himself.

As God Almighty and as loving God. Almighty and loving. This is where the question springs from – how can almighty and loving God allow those terrible things to happen? Maybe He is not almighty? Or maybe He is not loving?

How to reconcile what we witness happening in the world with the picture of God who claims to be almighty and loving? That was also Job's question. Now, today I invite you to reflect on how our God responds to these questions.

We will consider His answer in two parts – first, on being almighty, second – on being loving. Almighty. All-mighty. Meaning – capable to do whatever He decides. But, of course! He is the Creator of all things visible and invisible.

We use these words, but we have no grasp on the reality that they refer to. The Triune God is infinitely, infinitely superior than us. Us... we get arrogant and prideful even when we discover some laws of His creation.

When we learn how to use them to improve the quality of our lives. Which is, by the way, our God given task. To be fair, true scientists usually are humble and wonder at the marvellous and infinite complexity of God's creation.

It is those who have barely scratched the surface of knowledge that we have accumulated as humanity, who boast that there is no more need for God, now we understand everything, or at least that will soon know everything.

How childishly foolish is such arrogance! We know quite a lot and understand quite a bit... as humanity, as civilization. Not as individuals. But the Triune God, He conceived all that exists in His mind, He designed it, He created it from nothing, from the most elemental parts and laws of the Universe up to us, incredible and wonderful beings created in His Image and likeness.

He created it all, and He sustains it all, and He keeps it all going. What wisdom and power are those! We have no clue, no idea about the greatness of our God, as we have almost no idea about most things in this vast Universe.

How can He answer to our "why"? How can He explain to us how He runs this Universe? How could we possibly understand it? We are gradually getting to understand how the laws of creation operate, even as we have not a slightest idea of what these laws in themselves are.

We can only describe them at work, not to explain them. But that's nothings. Now think about life. About every living being. About every human being. The Triune God knows everything about everyone. He forms our bodies, He makes them grow, He has determined the number of our days before there was one.

He knows what is going on in every cell of our bodies. He knows our every thought, feeling and desire. He knows all our interactions. I mean, not only people in our lives, but also the impact of every one of our thoughts and actions and attitudes during our lifetime as well as their effect on the generation to come. He knows all of that for every one of us. Since the very beginning.

When we will stand before His glory throne, all of that will be revealed. Everything will be revealed, and we will see that everything that He had ever done was – very good. But ... how can He explain this to us now?!

How could He answer to our "why"? How could we possibly be able to comprehend His answers? He is God the Almighty. He is the Creator. He is the author of life and death is under His control. All things visible and invisible.

Now our second question. How can He communicate to us that He is loving, and not only that He is loving, but that He loves us? That tragedies and sufferings in our lives are not signs of His anger, indifference or absence? How could He, the Infinite One, convince us of His unconditional love?

The answer is, He needs to be very creative. He needs to find shortcuts that would communicate to us His love even if the full explanation of what is happening in this world is beyond our reach. Our loving God has done just that.

Since the beginning He has revealed Himself as a loving and gracious God. Remember the creation of first man, the intimate picture of Him forming Adam from the dust of the ground and then breathing into him the breath of life?

Remember the promise that He gave right after our first parents have brought sin and death into this world. It was our loving God who promised that He will restore the goodness of His creation, even as that will cost Him His life.

He is not a distant watchmaker God, who set everything in motion and then left it be. In the fulness of time, He came to us as one of us. The Infinite and Almighty Creator became one of us. He assumed humanity into Himself.

He united humanity with Himself. He experienced firsthand what our life is like. He suffered more than any of us can even imagine, more than any human being in history. For He knew clearly what was awaiting Him.

Betrayal by His closest. He delivered Himself into the hands of His enemies. He was tortured, suffered and died in agonizing death ... innocent. Voluntarily. From the hands of those whom He in His love had come to rescue and bless. He is God, who knows how it is to suffer in flesh.

But then He was raised again, and... He remained as one of us. Forever. Remember how we have often reflected how intimately close our Triune God is to us – that He indwells in us, that He is with us, that He embraces us into the wonderful divine fellowship with Himself as our Father and our Brother.

But there is another aspect to it. Our sufferings. He brings us into divine fellowship with Him, but He also steps down to walk with us in our daily lives. He embraces us with everything that is happening in our life. He is with us.

He knows what you worry about. He knows what you think, what you feel. When you hurt, He hurts. When you suffer, He suffers with you. When you experience loss, He experiences with you. When you weep, He weeps with you.

He is God Almighty who shares in your sufferings. Whenever anything happens to you, for Him it is like touching His eyeball. There is nothing in your life that He doesn't experience with you. He is God with us. God with you. God who suffers with you and who loves you in your sufferings. Till the end.

This is His answer to our "why". And it is shocking. That the Almighty would suffer for us and with us. This is how much your God loves you. He has prepared for us all that is His, and for now He shares in everything that is ours.

One final thought on sufferings. We don't like them. People try to avoid them. Many preach that if you are a Christian, then God will spare you of all sufferings and your life will go from happiness to happiness. False!

Do you know how powerful our God is? He can create something beautiful even through sufferings. His presence can make our sufferings not only bearable, but even bring forth through our suffering goodness and beauty.

Think about Job! What happened to Him has comforted, encouraged and uplifted in the midst of their sufferings millions and millions of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Think about Paul and the apostles!

Today we heard a glimpse of what Paul's life was like. The sea of sufferings. The same was true for other apostles and they all ended their lives in violent death. And ... the Church of Christ was born through their sufferings.

Think about Martin Luther! What was his life like? Full of sufferings and constant pressures. Being an outlaw. Under constant spiritual attacks. Living through plagues. Losing his loved ones.

But that was those sufferings and pressures through which our Suffering God helped Luther to discover, preach and teach such incredibly beautiful and clear Gospel message that changed the world.

Think about your lives! When have you grown them most? When have you experienced the presence and healing of our God the most? Yes, the answer most likely will be – in the midst of your sufferings.

Finally, think about Jesus! It was through His sufferings and death where He won the greatest victory defeating not only devil, but also sin and death itself. It was Jesus' horrific sufferings that brought us eternal life of blessedness and joy in New Heavens and New Earth.

This is how our God responds to our "why". He is almighty. He is loving. He is with us in our sufferings, and it is especially through our sufferings that He shapes us to be ever more beautiful, ever more gracious, humbler and wiser ... more and more like His beloved Son, our dear Lord and Brother Jesus Christ.

And one day, all sufferings will be over. And we will see our almighty and loving God as He is and when that happens, everything will be answered.

Amen.