

Oh God, you are my God. Eagerly I seek you. My soul thirsts for you, my flesh faints for you as a barren of dry land where there is no water. Therefore I gazed upon you and your holy place, that I might behold your power and your glory. Amen.

There is a sense of foreboding that I often feel in the face of all the unsettling things that are going on in our world. Wars and rumors of wars, threatening groups causing chaos worldwide, domestic indiscriminate bombings and shootings, hunger and tragedy in many areas of the world. Add to this strident discourse rather than thoughtful and active dialogue in politics, and in other venues in our country. None of us is immune to personal tragedy and concerns which can keep us awake at night. What shall we say to these things?

When Jesus was asked about these things, he had to count on the basic assumption of his day that suffering was the result of sin. Well yes, if we don't take care of ourselves and others, we are vulnerable to the consequences. I lost a friend to cancer not too long ago, even though she did all she could to prevent the disease from causing her untimely death. It was capricious. What shall we say to these things?

In this morning's gospel from St. Luke, we have reference to two disasters about which we have no historical proof, but they do serve as archetypes of similar incidents which were not unknown during Jesus' earthly ministry. In both cases, Jesus states clearly that those who perished were not worse offenders than those who escaped. He refutes again the common understanding that those who suffer calamity must be guilty of some great sin. Instead, Jesus proclaims that all of us are in need of repentance and renewal before God. Jesus is a realist, adverse things happen to us all. Try as we might, none of us can protect ourselves or those we love from every danger in life. There is always the possibility of being a victim of disease, traffic accidents, crime, emotional disorders, or random violence. Life is precious and fragile. What are we to say to these things?

Quite simply, and profoundly, we are to place ourselves into the hands of God. Into the hands of those who surround us with God's love. The instruments of this love are our families, friends, our church community, and those places of goodness in the community at large.

In his first letter to the church at Corinth, St. Paul shares that there is no suffering, no testing that we cannot endure. Our strength comes from knowing that we are God's beloved, and that there is no testing that is not common to us all. We are not alone. We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses who have walked through the valley of the shadow of death. We are not alone. Jesus is with us, and he knows deeply our strengths, our weaknesses, our fears, our sorrows, and joys.

As we walk with Jesus during this season of Lent and into Holy Week, we walk with God's pure love found in Jesus showing us all the path of love and freeing us from any self-absorption and pettiness that can prevent us from fully living into God's abundant love. In Jesus, we see the path of love that makes space for others. That is the opposite of self-seeking. In Jesus, we see a love that endures, even and most definitely on the cross. The love of God surrounds us at all times. God yearns for us to draw near and to respond to that love with ourselves.

We are called to live not in fear, but rather in love, pouring out ourselves as a balm for a hurting world. We are called to share ourselves in order to build God's dream. Our presiding Bishop, and I call him dear Michael Curry, I really like the man, says that we are called to be part of the Jesus movement, the movement of God's love in this world, following in the footsteps of Jesus. Bishop Curry says that this movement is not without struggle. It is not easy, it is difficult. It is hard work. We are following Jesus to the cross and through the cross to the resurrection where there is new life and new possibility. Our calling is to help this world move from fear, from what is often a nightmare of the world itself, into the dream that God's love intends. That perfect love does cast out fear. I can hear dear Michael sharing these words in assurance in his own wonderful way.

God love you. God bless you.
Have a blessed Lent and a glorious Easter.
You keep the faith.
Amen.