

24th Sunday in Ordinary Time - Mark 8: 27 – 35

Why does God permit evil to happen in our world? Where is God when another small African child dies of starvation because of a corrupt political system? Where is God when hundreds of people are killed in an unexpected earthquake? Where is God when a young mother of 25 with two small children is told she has a brain tumor and 6 months to live? Where is God when the people we love reject us or the people we trust betray us? Where is God when time and again it seems as if greed and violence are stronger than service and peace in our world? Where is God?

These are important and frightening questions to believers, and that is why today's gospel is important. Because the question of **where** God is is connected to the question of **who** God is.

And Jesus asks a “who question” of his disciples: “Who do you say that I am?” Peter is quick to respond: You are the Messiah. You are God's chosen agent, the one through whom God will save us.

Peter's answer is correct and Jesus accepts it, but immediately He orders Peter to say nothing about this to anyone. Jesus gives that order because although Peter's answer is correct, it is incomplete, and Jesus knows it.

Although God is Savior, Jesus knows that at times God will not be savior. If time and again we can point and believe to events in our life where God protects us from evil, we can also point to some events where God seems to be absent and where evil seems to have its way with us and those that we love.

Jesus' command to silence is a way of acknowledging that simply to say that God is savior is not complete. Evil will remain in our lives. And it would have been really helpful for Jesus then to tell us why God permits evil in our lives.

But he does not do that. Because He does not do that, to this day, Christians have no explanation for the presence of evil. We know that God does not send evil and that God is not the cause of evil, but why God permits evil—we have no idea.

It remains a mystery to which Jesus gave no explanation. But even though Jesus does not explain why evil is present, He does tell us something important about evil.

Jesus tells us that God will somehow **share** in the evil of our lives. Jesus begins to teach His disciples that He must suffer and die on the cross. Jesus Himself will suffer. So, who is Jesus? Messiah, Savior, yes. But not a Messiah or Savior who will protect us from every evil. But rather one who will **share** in the evils we must endure.

Elie Wiesel the great Jewish writer tells of a horrible scene in his book called *Night*. It occurred while he was a prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp during the Second World War. Two young children close to starvation had stolen some bread from their Nazi captors. In response their captors sentenced them to death, but they wanted the execution to be public so that everyone could see what would happen if the camp rules were not followed.

So Wiesel remembers standing in horror among the group of prisoners as the children were led up to the gallows, as ropes were slipped around their necks, and as they were hoisted up.

Because they were so little, their weight did not help them to die quickly. The horrified crowd had to watch as they slowly suffocated. In response to this unspeakable violence and injustice, a man standing behind Wiesel whispered, “Where is God? Where is God now?” To his surprise, Wiesel heard a voice in his own heart whisper back: “Where is God? God is hanging with the children on the gallows.”

Who is Christ? We commonly say that Christ is the one who suffered for us. That is true. But Christ is also the one who suffers **with** us.

We cannot explain why evil remains in our lives and in our world. But the revelation of Christ makes it clear that when evil happens, God is not distant or unconcerned.

We cannot explain why evil happens, but we know where God is when evil happens. When we must face loss, sickness, rejection, or pain, where is God? God is with us on the gallows. AMEN.