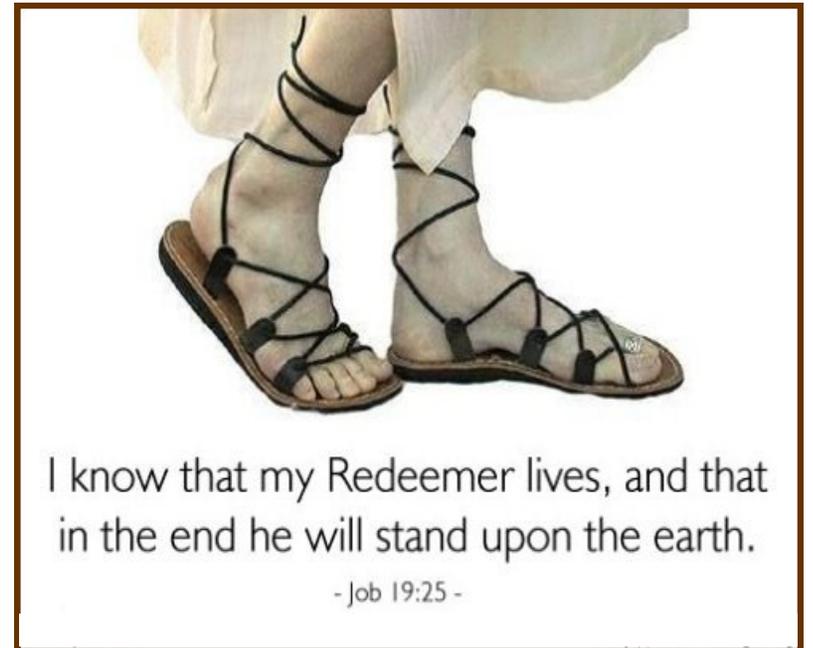


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Job

Chapter Thirteen:



Prosperity and Adversity

The commentary on the Book of Job, is by Saint Thomas Aquinas and was translated by Brian Mulladay and edited by Rev. Joseph Kenny, O.P. The book shows how human affairs are ruled by divine providence using probable arguments.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN PROSPERITY AND ADVERSITY

The First Lesson: The Perversity of the Friends of Job

1 Behold my eye has seen all these things and my ear has heard them, and I understood each one. 2 I also know in the same way you do nor am I inferior to you. 3 Yet, let me speak to the Almighty and I desire to dispute with him. 4 First, I will show you are makers of a lie and worshippers of false dogmas. 5 Would that you were silent so that people would think you were wise men! 6 Listen, then, to my correction and hear the judgment of my lips. 7 Do you think that God needs your lie so that you can speak deception for him? 8 Do you take God's part and try to judge for God? 9 Or will it please him from whom nothing can be concealed? Or will he be deceived like a man by your fraudulent practices? 10 He himself will blame you because you took his part secretly. 11 He will rouse himself immediately and he will throw you into confusion and his terror will rush upon you. 12 Your memory will be like ashes and your necks will be laid low in the mud.

After Job had shown that the excellence of divine power could be known by experience, he concludes, "Behold, my eye has seen all these things and my ear has heard them," as if to say: I know the effects described before which show divine strength and wisdom partly by sight and partly by hearing. Nor has my knowledge rested in these sensible effects; but from them I have ascended to the understanding of the truth, and so he says, "and I understood each one," that is, what each effect demonstrated about God, or about his wisdom, understanding, counsel, or strength. So excluding their boasting, by which they seemed to be putting themselves before Job by manifesting the great things of God, he then says, "I also know in the same way you do," those things which pertain to the magnificence of God, "nor am I inferior to you," in that I know less or imperfectly those things or I were learning them only from you.

The Apostle Paul says:
"We are found to be false witnesses of God, because we have given testimony against God that He raised Christ to life who has not been raised if the dead are not raised."
(1 Cor. 15:15)

Fourth, someone could object that, even though Job had not committed grave sins, he had still committed some sins which are inevitable in this present life, and so he is punished for these in this way. He also rejects this saying, "Have you placed my foot in fetters; and observed all my paths, and have you considered the traces of my footsteps, I who am consumed like something rotten and like a garment eaten by the moth?" Here we should consider that those who are placed in prison fetters are so bound that they cannot get free. Just as a man's foot is bound in fetters, so the proceeding of man is bound by the law of divine justice from which he cannot turn away. This is why he says, "Have you placed my foot in fetters? Divine justice evaluates the deeds of men, not only as to what each one does, but also as to what spirit and with what end, and so he says, "and observed all my paths," that is, my deeds, "and have you considered the traces of my footsteps," as to the good-will of the doer and also all of the circumstances of the deed. It seems unreasonable that God should have such great care for human acts if they disappear completely in the death of the body, a death which is sometimes natural and sometimes violent. So for both he adds, "I who am consumed like something rotten," expressing natural death, "and like a garment eaten by the moth," expressing a violent death, saying in effect: If as my friends suppose there is no other life except the present one which man loses either by rotting away or by being cast down, it seems unreasonable that God would be concerned with such great strictness about human acts that he punishes man even for the slightest sins and negligence.

END OF JOB CHAPTER 13

But as Sophar had proposed the divine excellence (11:6) as an argument against Job for undertaking to dispute with God, he continues, "Yet let me speak to the Almighty," as if to say: Although I understand from his diverse effects the excellence of divine wisdom and power not less than you, I am still not reasonably altered by this from my proposition. But rather I want to address God moved by opening my heart to Him who is the searcher and judge of hearts, and by searching for the truth from Him who is the doctor of all truth. So he adds, "and I desire to dispute with him," not to disapprove of his judgments, but to destroy your errors, according to which it would follow that there would be injustice in God. So he continues, "First I will show that you are makers of lies," because they had invented the lie that Job had led an evil life. They had arrived at this lie because they were mistaken about the faith with which one worships God, believing that recompense of merits and punishments only happen in this life, and he therefore says, "and you are worshippers of perverse dogmas." For whoever turns aside from the true knowledge of God worships not God but with his own false dogmas. In saying, "first I will show you," one should not understand as if first in the order of the following teaching he is going to destroy their perverse doctrines and then afterward dispute with God; but that while he intends to dispute with God first in his intention is to destroy their doctrines.

Men often propose some things as capable of being proved, although they are false; but when they do not know how to defend them or prove them convincingly they show their ignorance when they speak. This was the case with the friends of Job. So he then says, "Would that you were silent so that people would think you were wise men," because the very fact that you defend and prove false dogmas unfittingly shows that you are foolish. So, since you propose false dogmas and you take unsuitable means to prove them, you are in need of correction. This is what he concludes, saying then, "Listen, then, to my correction," by which I will correct your process of reasoning, "and hear the judgment of my lips," with which I will condemn your false dogmas.

First he intends to correct their unfitting process of reasoning, for since they had posited that rewards and punishments of good and evil works are repaid in this present life, it was necessary for them to use lies in defending the justice of God. Because it is evident that some innocent and just men are oppressed by adversities in this life, it was therefore necessary to impute crimes to the just to defend the justice of God. So they charged Job with impiety because they saw him afflicted. But one who defends the truth by lies uses unfitting means, so he says, "Do you think that God needs your lie?" as if to say: Is it necessary to use lies to defend divine justice? In fact, what cannot be defended except by lies cannot possibly be true. However when someone strives to lie against the clear truth, he is compelled to invent some crafty and fraudulent means to color his lie with fraud. So when these men too tried to lie against the justice of Job which was clear to all, they used some deceptions, namely, they pointed to the human frailty which falls easily into sin and compared it to divine excellence, so that one might think it was more likely that Job was evil than that God was unjust. So he then says, "so that you might speak deception for him?" because they were speaking with deceit in God's behalf when they tried deceitfully to charge Job with impiety to defend God's justice.

They could respond, however, that they did not say anything deceitfully against Job, but only what they thought. Job therefore shows that if this were true, they would fall into another vice although they had been excused from deceit, namely, the respect of persons which excludes the justice of a judge. Respect of persons consists in someone condemning or denying the justice of another which is apparent because of the greatness in the other person, although he does not know his justice. If, therefore, the friends of Job judged him to be evil, though they saw justice clearly in him and did so only in the consideration of the divine greatness, although they could not understand according to their own dogmas how Job might be punished by God justly, it is as if they were respecting the person of God in the judgment with which they condemned Job. So he then says, "Do you take God's part and try to judge for God?" He clearly says this because someone strives to judge for another, who does not know his justice, and yet tries to invent any means he can to show that his cause is just.

Then, as though the one to whom he had given the part of the opponent were silent, Job himself assumes the part of the objector and asks about the causes of his punishment. First, since someone could object that God punished him as his enemy, he rejects this by saying, "Why do you hide your face and think of me as your enemy?" For it seems evil that someone regard someone else as an enemy without proof. But the only fitting cause for hostility is an offense. Thus it is evident that God thinks a man his enemy when his sins are clear. But Job had asked Him to show him his sins, and they had not been shown to him. So there appeared no reason why God was unfriendly to him. He insinuates this when he says, "Why do you hide our face?" as though he hated Job secretly for a hidden motive. For the face of a man who hates is uncovered when he does not hide the reason for his hatred.

Second, because someone could object that God punished him in order to show his power, he rejects this cause saying, "Do you show your power against the leaf which is driven by the wind?" For it is not fitting that some very powerful man should wish to show his power against something very weak. The human condition is compared to a leaf, which is driven by the wind, because man himself is both frail and weak like a leaf which falls easily, and notwithstanding the passing of time and the variety of fortune, he is driven like a leaf by the wind. So it does not seem fitting to say that God punishes man only in order to show his power in man's case.

Third, since someone could object that God punished him because of the sins which he committed in his youth, he also rejects this by saying, "Do you break a dry stalk? Do you write bitter things against me, and do you want to consume me for the sins of my youth?" For a man in his youth is compared to green grass, but in his old age he is compared to a dry stalk. It seems that to punish a man in his old age for the sins of his youth is as though someone should rage violently against a stalk for not being green grass. But we should note in this examination that he does not deviate from this opinion that the adversities of man are caused by divine judgment, and to indicate this he says, "You write bitter things against me," as though bitter things, that is, the adversities of man result from the writing of divine sentence.

Now a debate is between two persons: namely, the one making objections and the other one answering them. So, in entering a dispute with God, he gives him the option of choosing which role he wants to take: the one making objections or the one answering. He therefore says, "Call me and I will answer you," saying in effect: You object and I will answer. "Or at least allow me to speak," by raising objections, "and you will answer me." He says this figuratively to show that he is prepared to do both, either to defend the truth which he professes, or to refute what might be said against the truth. First he offers God the part of the opposing party saying, "Show me what great crimes, sins, wicked deeds, and faults I have." Here one must consider that Job's friends seemed to argue against Job, as though taking the part of God, according to what was said already, "Do you take God's part to try to judge for God?" (v:8) Now the friends of Job used the argument against him that he had been punished for his sins. He therefore asks that God will use this objection against him saying; "Show me what great iniquities, sins, wicked deeds and faults I have," saying in effect: If then you afflict me for my sins, as my friends charge falsely trying to speak for you, I ask you to show me for what sins you afflict me so gravely. So he does not say, "what evils I have," but "what great," because if there is no other reason for present afflictions than the sins of men, as is the opinion of the friends of Job, those sins must be the most grievous which are punished with the most grievous afflictions. Some sins are sins of commission done against the negative precepts of the law. There are other sins of omission by which one neglects affirmative precepts of the law. One does something against a precept of the law in three ways: in one way when he harms his neighbor, like theft, murder, and things of this sort which are properly named "wickedness" because they are contrary to the equity of justice which regards the other. In another way a man sins against himself by a disorder of his own act, as appears especially in the sins of gluttony and lust, and these are called "sins," as certain disorders of man. In a third way one sins directly against God in deeds like blasphemy and sacrilege. These are called "crimes" because of their gravity. Omissions are properly called "delinquencies."

Sometimes one person in fraudulently defending another's cause pleases him despite the fact that he is a just man. This can happen in two ways: in one way because he is ignorant that his cause is unjust, and so he is pleased that he is defended by someone, and this he excludes from God saying, "Or will it please him (God)," that you strive to judge unjustly in his behalf for he cannot be ignorant of the case and so he says, "from whom nothing can be concealed?" This can happen in another way when the man whose case is defended by fraud is deceived by the frauds of the one defending him, so that he thinks his defense is just. He excludes this from God saying, "Or is he deceived like a man by your fraudulent practices?" Therefore it is clear that God does not need a lie to defend his goodness and justice because truth can be defended without a lie. So then, it is also evident if when their dogmas are accepted, the unfitting conclusion follows that the justice of God needs a lie for its defense, then it becomes clear that their proposed teachings are false.

One must also carefully consider that he who uses a lie to show the justice and the goodness of God not only does a thing which God does not need, but also offends God in this very act. For since God is truth, and every lie is contrary to the truth, whoever uses a lie to show the magnificence of God acts against God by this very act. The Apostle Paul says this very clearly, "We are found to be false witnesses of God, because we have given testimony against God that He raised Christ to life who has not been raised if the dead are not raised." (1 Cor. 15:15) To say then that God raised the dead, if this is not true, is against God although it may seem to show divine power, because it is against the truth of God. So those who use a lie to defend God not only do not receive a reward as though they were pleasing to Him, but they also merit punishment as though acting against God, and so he continues, "He Himself blames you because you took His part secretly." He says, "secretly" because although they seem exteriorly to take the part of God, as if knowing the justice of God, yet in their consciences they did not know by what justice Job had been punished, and thus in the hidden part of hearts they respected God's person in trying to defend his justice falsely.

He now shows how God will blame them saying, “He will rouse himself immediately and he will throw you into confusion,” as if to say:

Merely because you are not suffering adversity, dispute about the justice of God with a tranquil mind. But if tribulation comes upon you (which he calls God rousing himself because in Scripture punishment is called the anger of God) your minds will be thrown into confusion, especially because it is not solidly grounded in the truth. Since they did not think anything was good or evil but temporal goods, when they avoided sins so that no evil thing would befall them, they seemed to wish to serve God only because of the fear of present evils.

So he says, “and his terror will rush upon you,” for you only fear God because of the fear of experiencing evil now, and that is just what will happen to you according to Proverbs, “What the unjust man fears will come upon him.” (10:24)

Because they had vainly promised Job that even after death he would live in the memory of men (11:18), in his turn he promises the contrary to them as though mocking them, saying, “Your memory will be like ashes.”

For as ashes after the consumption of wood remain a short time, so the reputation of man passes away quickly after death. Hence, it is vain to expect fame after death. They also had promised him immutability and reverence for his tomb after death, (11:19) but this also he accounts as leading to nothing and he promises the contrary to them saying, “your necks will be cast down in the mud.”

By their necks he means their power and dignity which he says will be thrown down “in the mud” i.e., to a weak and contemptible thing.

Since, then, he has sought someone to argue with him, saying, “Who will be judged with me?” and as he had said already, “I desire to dispute with God,” (v.3) from here on he speaks as if he is in the presence of God and is disputing with Him. But for a man to dispute with God does not seem fitting because of the excellence by which God excels man.

However, one must consider that the truth does not change because of the difference of persons and so when someone speaks the truth, he cannot be convinced of the contrary no matter with whom he argues. Now Job was sure that he was speaking the truth inspired by God through the gift of faith and wisdom. So, though he confided in the truth, he asks that divine strength might not strike him down, either through the evils he presently bore, or through the fear others to be inflicted. He says this, “Spare me in only two things, and then I will not hide myself from your face,” as if: I will not be afraid to dispute with you. For when someone is afraid, he usually hides himself from the sight of those whom he fears. He shows these two things when he says, “Keep your hand far from me,” that is, do not whip me with the scourges of the present.

“And let not your power terrify me,” with future punishments. For a man can be impeded in these two ways from being able to defend even the truth which he knows for certain in a disputation: when he is either molested in body or disturbed by fear or by some other passion in the soul.

The Second Lesson: Job asks God what Grievances He has against Him

13 Be silent for a little while so I can say everything the mind suggests to me. 14 Why should I tear my flesh with my teeth and carry my soul in my hands? 15 Even if he should kill me, I will hope in him; nevertheless, I will blame my own conduct in his sight, 16 and he will be my savior: for no hypocrite will come into his presence. 17 Hear my discourse and understand my riddles with your ears. 18 If I were judged, I know I would be found just. 19 Who will be judged with me? Let him come! Why must I be spent in remaining silent? 20 Spare me in only two things and then I will not hide myself from your face. 21 Put your hand far from me, and let not your power terrify me. 22 Call me and I will answer you, or at least allow me to speak and you will answer me. 23 Show me how many crimes, sins, wicked deeds and faults I have. 24 Why do you hide your face and think of me as your enemy? 25 Do you show your power against a leaf which is driven by the wind? Do you break a dry stick? 26 Do you write bitter things against me and do you want to consume me with the sins of my youth? 27 Have you placed my foot in fetters; have you observed my paths and have you considered the traces of my footsteps, I who must be consumed like something rotten and like a garment eaten by moths.

After Job had corrected the process of reasoning of the friends who sought to defend divine justice with lies, he now proceeds to destroy their false dogmas under the form of a debate with God. First he asks for attention, as though he were about to say important things saying, "Be silent for a little while, so I can say everything my mind suggests to me." He adds this because perhaps they could say, "You say useless things and so you should not be heard." But to listen to whatever someone says for a little while is not burdensome. Or he adds this phrase to show that he is not going to speak by composing lies or by devising frauds, but what he has in his mind.

Then as he is about to enter into a debate, he first renders his listeners attentive in two ways: in one way by couching what he will say with a certain mystery, since if we declare what must be said to be difficult, our listeners would be more attentive. So he says, "Hear my discourse and understand my riddle with your ears." A riddle is an obscure discourse, which presents one thing on the surface and means something else internally. In another way he renders them attentive by assuring them of the truth of what he is about to say, and so he says, "If I am judged, I know I will be found just," which he certainly does not say about his own innocence, since he has already said, "I will blame my own conduct in His presence." (v.15) But he says this of the truth of the doctrine about which they were disputing as though in a trial. The one is found just in a trial in whose favor the sentence is decided. So when someone in debate is shown to be speaking the truth he is found just as if in a trial.

After he has rendered his listeners attentive, he determines the manner of his disputation. For he wants to dispute in the form of a debate. He expresses this saying, "Who will be judged with me?" that is, with whom may I debate about the truth? "Let him come," that is, let him come forward to dispute! He then states the reason why he intends to dispute about the truth, saying, "Why am I spent in remaining silent?" For man is spent little by little in the course of this present life, especially when he has been subjected to infirmity like Job. He is spent in silence when he so passes this present life that he still does not leave any trace of his wisdom by his teaching. To avoid suffering this fate then, Job had decided not to be silent about the truth so that he might live on after death in his teaching, although consumed in his body. There can also be another explanation. Indeed, when someone expresses externally a pain which he suffers in his heart, his soul is in a certain sense pacified, whereas in remaining silent, his pain becomes more acute interiorly and he is somehow consumed by his own silence.

His friends have accused Job of two things: impatience and ostentation, (4:2 and 7) both of which he excludes from himself so that he might not seem in the following disputation to speak either from anger or from pride.

Observe that impatience comes from an overabundance of sorrow not moderated by reason, for sorrow leads to despair when excessive. As a result of despair a man disregards the health of both his body and soul. So to exclude impatience he says, "Why do I tear my flesh with my teeth?" as if to say:

There is no reason why I should despair of the health of my body through impatience like those who in despair of bodily life and devour their own flesh when they are oppressed by hunger. And also why "should I carry my soul in my hands?" for there is no reason why I should disregard the salvation of my soul.

For what a man carries in his hands is lost easily, and so it seems one is not very afraid to lose it. But a man hides what he is afraid of losing. He then states the reason why he should neither tear his flesh through impatience nor carry his soul in his hands, saying, "Even if he should kill me, I will hope in him," saying in effect:

You do not believe because of the temporal evils which I suffer that I have stopped hoping in God.

For if my hope were in God only because of temporal goods, I would be driven to despair for he already said, "I have despaired." (7:16)

But because my hope is in God because of spiritual goods which remain after death, even if he afflicts me unto death, the hope which I have in him will not end.

However, because hope which is inordinate degenerates into presumption, he adds, "nevertheless, I will blame my own conduct in his sight," as if to say: I do not hope in him because I believe he will free me even if I will persevere in sin, but because I believe he will free me if I will renounce my sins. Therefore, "he will be my savior," if my sins will be displeasing to me.

He shows why God saves those who blame their own conduct in his presence saying, "for no hypocrite will come into his presence," for he is a hypocrite who although is unjust, nevertheless professes openly to be just and does not accuse his conduct in the presence of God.

Therefore "he will not come into the presence of God," to see God in whom the ultimate salvation of man consists something which Job will explain later at greater length (4:13 and 19:25). He will still come into his presence to be judged by him.

Thus he has not only excluded impatience from himself, but also the presumption of innocence, when he confesses publicly that he blames his conduct in the presence of God so that in so doing every calumny of his friends may end.