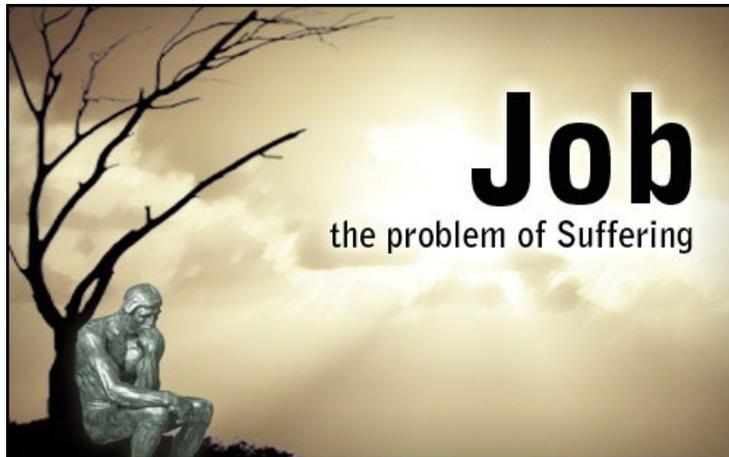


Then he excludes himself from the vice of extreme desire even in things he has acquired in his own possession. This is shown in two ways. In one way by the fact that man is eager to extract too much profit from his own possessions by excessive cultivation, and he excludes this metaphorically saying, "If my land cries out against me," because it seemed I have not permitted it to rest, and I had planted it too much. So he says, "and its furrows weep with it." He speaks using the metaphor of a man who is excessively anxious. In another way excessive desire for possessions is shown when a man denies the price of their labor to his workers, and so he says, "If I have eaten his yield without payment," without money paid the workers, "and I have afflicted the soul of the farmers," either by compelling them to work excessively or by taking away their salary. Now it is just that one who desires superfluous and uncommon profit loses even what is due and common. So he says, "in place of wheat," sown for the nourishment of men, "let nettles grow for me," which not only are useless, but prickly. "And for barley," which is sown as cattle feed, "the thorn," which even wounds cattle by pricking them. When he had said all these things, the epilogue comes next when it is said, "Here the words of Job end," because he proposes nothing after this to prove his proposition.

END OF JOB CHAPTER 31



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Job

Chapter Thirty One:



I know that my Redeemer lives, and that
in the end he will stand upon the earth.

- Job 19:25 -

Job Seeks Justice

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 THIRTY ONE: JOB SEEKS JUSTICE

The First Lesson: Job is Chaste, Just and Good

1 I made a covenant with my eyes to not think about a young girl. 2 What part does God above have in me and what inheritance does the Almighty have on high? 3 Is it not damnation for the wicked and aversion for those doing evil? 4 Does he not consider my ways and does he not number all my steps? 5 If I have walked in vanity, and my foot hastened to deception, 6 let him weigh me in a just balance and let God know my simplicity. 7 If my step has turned aside from the way, if my eye has followed my heart, 8 and if any spot cleaves to my hands, let me sow and another eat and my sons rooted up. 9 If my heart has been deceived by a woman and if I have lain in wait at my neighbor's door, 10 let my wife be the prostitute of another and others bend down over her. 11 This is a sinful thing and the greatest evil, 12 it is a fire which devours even to consuming and eradicates all seed. 13 If I despised subjecting myself to judgment with my servant and my handmaid when they wanted to settle some complaint against me, 14 when the Lord God rises up to judge me what will I do and when he questions, what will I answer him? 15 Did not he make me in the womb who also made him? And did not one God form me in the womb? 16 If I denied the poor what they sought and if I have made the eyes of the widow wait, 17 if I ate my morsel alone and the orphan did not share it, 18 since mercy has increased in me from my infancy and came forth with me from the womb of my mother. 19 If I despised the man passing by because he did not have clothing. 20 If his loins have not blessed me and if I was not warmed with the fleece of my sheep. 21 If I have raised my hand against the orphan, even when they saw me at the gate, elevated, 22 let my shoulder fall from its joint and my arm be crushed with its bones. 23 For I always feared God like the swelling of the waves over me, and his weight I could not bear.

After Job had told of his former prosperity (c.29) and his subsequent adversity, (c. 30) he now shows his innocence so that one does not believe that he had fallen into adversities because of sins. He begins to show his innocence by his freedom from the sin of lust which involves most men. One easily slips into this sin, because unless someone avoids the beginnings, he can scarcely withdraw from the things which come after. The glance of the eyes in which one looks at a beautiful woman, especially a virgin is the first motion in this sin. Second, is the thought, third, the pleasure, fourth, the consent, and fifth, the deed. Job wanted to exclude the beginnings of this sin so that he would not get entangled in it, and so he says, "I made a covenant," in my heart I confirmed it like treaties are confirmed, "with my eyes," from whose sight the eager desire of women comes, to so abstain from looking at women, "to not think about a virgin," that is, to not arrive at even the first interior stage, thought. For he saw that it was difficult if he fell into the first stage of thought to not totter into the others, namely, desire and consent.

Since he has said many great things about himself, he invokes divine witness about these things, and so he then says, "Who would give me an advocate," who will appeal to God with me? He shows why he desires help saying, "that the Almighty might hear my desire?" He shows what his desire is then saying, "and write the book," either of accusation or recommendation of me in what I have said with "he who judges," all human acts, both interior and exterior. If in the testimony of this book, by the certain manifestation of the truth I am also shown to be guilty, I want to endure the punishment, and so he says, "Let me carry it on my shoulders." If, however, after the truth has been manifested I appear worthy of praise, then let me receive the crown of reward, and so he then says, "and let it encircle me like a crown." In this he shows his desire that one who was condemned unjustly by his friends, be saved by the just judgment of God. He promises that he will not contradict this book containing the divine witness. "For every one of my steps," with the progress of my works, "I will announce it," that is, I will acknowledge the truth of God's testimony and I will not refuse to submit to the sentence according to divine witness. So he says, "and as to a prince I will offer it," joyfully accepting the fact that he was dealt with on the basis of God's testimony.

He further shows the perfection of his virtue by excluding undue anxiety. Men usually hide a crime because of the fear of embarrassment, and they sometimes do this against justice, either by denying it, which he excludes from himself saying, "If I hid like a man," as men often do, "my sin," by denying it unjustly; they may also excuse it, or even cover it over with some crafty devices, and so he then says, "and if I have hidden in my bosom," by hidden pretence, "my sin," when I am bound to confess it. He then excludes from himself the inordinate fear of bodily dangers, which especially proceed from a great mob rising up against a man as Sirach says, "My heart fears three things; the fanaticism of the city, the gathering of the people, etc." (26:5-6) So he says, "If I grew frightened at the great multitude." If man is despised by his kinsmen by whom he ought to be helped, this fear is increased, and so he says, "and if the contempt of my kinsmen terrified me." Fearless men are fearless of opposition through presumption, and sometimes, at least in words, speak against more powerful men. He excludes this from himself saying, "and if I have not kept silent." Sometimes they proceed further and they dare presumptuously to attack a great number of adversaries, but he excludes this saying, "and did not go out of my door."

Then he shows why he is so solicitous to avoid this sin. First, he assigns the reason on the grounds that man seems to go away from God especially in the sin of lust. For man approaches God by spiritual actions, which are especially impeded by venereal pleasures, and so he then says, "What part does God above have in me?" as if to say: God above has a part in me in proportion to the elevation of my mind to higher things; but if my mind is cast down by lust to carnal pleasure, God above will have no part in me. Even the lustful happen to think about God spiritually for a while, but soon by the desire of pleasure they are called back down below, and so God's portion cannot be steadfast in them like an inheritance. So he then says, "and what inheritance," the firm hold in me after I stripped down to lower things, "the Almighty on high" he also lives on high cannot have. So it is necessary that his inheritance be in those who seek sublime, spiritual things, but not in those who descend towards carnal things. Second, the reason why he shunned the sin of lust is the damage which it brings upon men, which is twofold. One is corporeal, when a man because of the sin of lust incurs danger to his person and property, and so he says, "Is it not damnation for the wicked?" as if to say: The evil man who is involved in this sin rushes to damnation. Another damage is the impediment to doing good works, and so he says, "and aversion for those doing evil," for violent pleasure drags the soul more to itself. So men given to lust abandon good works, and even good talk. Third, he assigns the cause from the point of view of divine providence which looks attentively at all the deeds of men. Thus no one can be immune from punishment, and so he says, "Does he not consider my ways," the progress of my works to reward them? Not only does he know the entire process, but also the stages of that process and so he says, "and does he not number all my steps?" because he examines everything with his judgment, even the smallest details which seem reprehensible in my acts, and so I will not pass unpunished for them.

Second, he cleanses himself from the sin of deceit, using in this and in all the following discussion an execratory oath in which a man binds himself to a punishment, so that if what he says is not true, he obliges himself to punishment. So he says, "If I walked," if I acted "in vanity," in some falsehood. For things are called vain which lack solidity. Solidity consists especially in truth. He shows how one goes about in vanity when he then says, "and my foot hastened to deception," this refers to my affection and whatever other power of the soul is the principle of motion. He says clearly, "hastened to deception," because man intends by some deceitful means to obtain quickly what he might have obtained with great difficulty by means of the truth. One can consider walking without deceit by inspecting the righteousness of justice from which the deceitful man turns aside, and so he says, "let him (God) weigh me a just balance," to discern from his justice if I have proceeded in deceit. Since deceit consists especially in the intention of the heart, he alone can judge deceit to whom the intention of heart lies open, namely God. So he then says, "and let God know my simplicity," which is the contrary of the duplicity of deceit. He says, "let God know," not as though God is about to learn it as something new, but as if he makes it known to others as something new, or because he knows this from eternity in the reason of his justice.

Since he has excluded deceit from himself in general, he descends to certain special sins in which one deceitfully plots against the goods of another. This happens both in theft and in adultery. For in theft one plots by deceit against the possessions of his neighbor, and he excludes this from himself saying, "If my step has turned aside from the way," by disdaining justice, which has as its effect that man looks with a covetous eye at the goods of his neighbor to steal them. So he says, "if my eye (my desire) had followed my heart," as if to say: If my eye intends to have what my heart desired. Third, from contempt of justice and direct intention to acquire what his heart desires, a man may happen to use his hand to rob the goods of another, and so the text continues, "and if any spot cleaves to my hands," by taking the things of another. Now it is just that if one takes the goods of another, he should also have his goods despoiled by others, and so he says, "let me sow and another reap," as if to say: I have stolen another's goods, let others take my goods away. This is an execratory oath. Men often steal the goods of another so that they can amass wealth for their children, as the prophet Nahum said, "the lion seized what was sufficient for his cubs." (Nah. 2:13) Therefore it is just that the man who steals the things of another not only should have his own goods taken from him, but also that his sons should die, and so he says, "and my sons rooted up," for whom the booty seems to have been preserved.

Then he excuses himself from the sin of superstition, which is against God. In ancient times idol-worshippers who worshipped the stars of heaven, especially the great lights because of their great brightness. He shows he does not say, "If I looked at the sun when it shone and the moon moving in splendor," which caused the idolaters to worship them, "and my heart secretly rejoiced," as though I were devoted to them from interior worship. As for exterior cult he says, "and I kissed my hand with my lips," he shows why he avoided this saying, "this is the greatest evil." For if it is evil to offer what is due to one man to another, it seems the greatest evil that the cult due to God is offered to a creature. Since it is impossible for man to offer divine worship at the same time to God and a creature, he then says, "and the denial of God the Most High." Even though the name of God is attributed to some creatures by participation, the cult of latria is due only to the most high God, who is denied to be the most high if that cult is also offered to others.

After these things which pertain to justice in general, he continues with certain things which pertain to the perfection of virtue. Among these he first excludes the hatred of enemies. This is especially shown when someone rejoices either in his complete ruin, and he excludes this saying, "If I rejoiced at the ruin of him who hated me." Or he may rejoice in any evil which overcomes him, which he excludes adding, "and if I exulted when evil overtook him," had overcome him unexpectedly. He then shows why he should shun this saying, "For I did not give my tongue to sin, waiting and cursing his soul." Truly man naturally desires those things which he enjoys, and he expresses his interior desire in words. Therefore, it follows that if someone should rejoice in someone else's evil, that he would desire it, and consequently, in cursing him, he would invoke evil on him.

Then he shows the perfection of his own virtue as to the superabundance of goods which he bestowed on others. First, as to his domestics he says, "If the men of my tent have not said: Who will give us his meats to satisfy us?" When the meat of some animal is appetizing, men desire to eat their fill of it. By this then he shows us that his association was so pleasing to his household that they desired to be satisfied with the flesh of his presence. As for foreigners, he then says, "The pilgrim did not remain outside," so that he was not received in my house; "my door was open to the traveler," so that entry was not difficult for him.

The Second Lesson: Job concludes his Defense

24 If I have accounted gold my strength, and if I have said to finest gold: My security. 25 If I rejoiced over my abundant riches and because my hand had grasped even more, 26 if I looked at the sun when it shone and the moon moving in splendor 27 and my heart secretly rejoiced and kissed my hand with my lips: 28 this is the greatest evil and the denial of God the Most High. 29 If I rejoiced at the ruin of him who hated me and if I exulted when evil overtook him, 30 for I did not give my tongue to sin, waiting and cursing his soul. 31 If the men of my tent have not said: Who would give us his meats to satisfy us? 32 The pilgrim did not remain outside, my door was open to the travelers. 33 If I hid like a man my sin and if I have hidden evil in my bosom, 34 if I grew frightened at the great multitude and if the contempt of my kinsmen terrified me, if I have rather kept silent and did not go out of my door? 35 Who would give me an advocate that the Almighty might hear my desire and he who judges write the book? 36 Let him carry it on my shoulders and let it encircle me like a crown. 37 For every one of my steps I will announce it, and as to a prince I will offer it. 38 If my land cries out against me and its furious weep with it, 39 if I have eaten his yield without payment and I have afflicted the soul of the farmers, 40 let nettles grow for me in place of wheat and the thorn for barley. Here the words of Job end.

After Job excused himself from injustice (v.5) and lack of mercy (v.16), he now excuses himself from the inordinate affection for riches. This can come about in two ways. In one way, when man trusts too much in riches, and he excludes this saying, "If I accounted gold my strength," in that I reckoned my power principally in riches "and if to finest gold," which is the purest gold, "I have said: My security," i.e. this is my security, this is against what Paul says, "Tell the rich of this world not put their hope in the uncertainty of riches." (1 Tim. 6:17) Second, the affection of man is disordered through riches from the fact that he rejoices too much in possessing them, and so as to riches he already possessed he continues, "If I rejoiced," inordinately, "over my abundant riches," which I possessed as my own. As to the acquisition of riches he says, "and because my hand had grasped even more." For men usually rejoice more about what they have newly acquired.

In adultery, however, a man plots deceitfully against the wife of his neighbor, and this plot is preceded by a certain deception of heart, as long as reason is darkened by concupiscence, and so he says, "If my heart been deceived by a woman," referring to the desire of the wife of another. From the fact that the heart is conquered by concupiscence for a woman, one tries to possess the woman desired by any deceitful means whatever, and so he says, "and if I have lain in wait at my neighbor's door," to take advantage of his wife. He seems justly punished who soils the wife of another by adultery, in that his wife also is soiled by others, and so he says, "let my wife be the prostitute of another," let her offer herself for sale to others. From this it follows that others abuse her, and so he then says, "and others bend down over her," to commit adultery. He shows why he avoided this sin saying, "This is a sinful thing," because it is against the law of God which bound a man and a woman in matrimony. (cf. Matt. 19:6) "And," if one considers human justice, it is, "the greatest evil," because the greater the good taken away, the greater the injustice. If someone should steal a cow, it will be a greater injustice than if he should steal a sheep, and so it is punished by a greater penalty, as Exodus says. The man who commits adultery takes away the greatest thing from a man, his wife, who is one flesh with him (Gen. 2:24). He also takes away the certainty of offspring and consequently, the whole succession of his patrimony, which because of adultery, sometimes accrues to strangers. So the text continues, "it (adultery) is a fire, which devours even to consuming," because it cheats a man of his whole patrimony, as has been said, "and eradicates all seed," when it makes the succession of his sons uncertain, and so Sirach says, "Every woman leaving her husband will sin, and give him an heir by marrying another man." (23:32)

So after he has purged himself of injustice because he did not do injury to others, either in stealing things from them, or in abusing persons joined to them, he excuses himself, as a consequence, of the charge he has incurred injustice because of the defect of justice, and so he says, "If I despised subjecting myself to judgment with my servant and my handmaid when they wanted to settle some complaint against me," as if to say: If I despised rendering justice to those beneath me, let these and other grave consequences happen to me. He shows why he did not despise submitting to judgment with his servants saying, "When the Lord God rises up to judge me," that is, when he himself comes to judge, if I now despise his judgment, I would have no one in whose help or to whose counsel I could go for refuge. Nor would I even be able to rationally answer God in judgment, and so he says, "and when he questions," when he examines my deeds, "what will I answer him," what reason will I be able to give for not being willing to submit to judgment with my servants? He implies the answer "none." He proves as a consequence that all men naturally share the same condition, and so he says, "Did he not make me in the womb who also made him?" He means: I have the same soul created by God as my servants. My body has been formed also by the same divine power, and so he continues, "and did not one God" namely, the God who formed him, "form me in the womb?" So it is clear that it matters to God how I treat the other.

After he showed that he was not lustful (v.1) or unjust (v.5), he shows next that he was not without pity. He first shows this from the fact that he did not take benefits away from the poor. For some men deny alms to the poor man seeking them from the beginning. He excluded this from himself saying, "If I denied the poor what they sought." Some do not refuse them but put off giving the gift. He excludes this from himself saying, "and if I made the eyes of the widow wait." Others do not refuse nor defer giving what is asked, but they give nothing from their own initiative. He excludes this from himself, showing that he did not wish to use his smallest possessions alone, but rather to share them with others, and so he continues, "if I ate my morsel alone and the orphan did not share it." Here he implies: Let these things and other grave consequences happen to me. Notice that he speaks here with great precision. For the poor do not usually just beg, but they entreat earnestly, and therefore one cannot take away from them the benefit of mercy without completely denying it in every way. Widows beg, but they are afraid to entreat earnestly, and so, unless one aids them quickly, they are deprived of the benefit of mercy. Orphans do not even dare to beg, and thus it is necessary that one bestow mercy on them even without begging. He shows why he was merciful in this way in two ways: first, from long-studied habit he began in childhood, and so he says, "Since mercy has increased in me from my infancy." As he grew in years, so he practiced the works of mercy more. Second, because he had a natural inclination to mercy, like other men commonly have certain inclinations to different virtues, and so he says, "it came forth with me from the womb of my mother," because from the first days of my birth I was disposed to give mercy promptly.

There are usually two obstructions to mercy. One is the contempt of the poor whom one judges not worthy of mercy. One usually despises those who dress in poor clothes and honors those who dress in rich clothes, as Sirach says, "the clothes of the body reveal the man." (19:27) But he excludes this obstacle to mercy from himself saying, "If I despised the man passing by," any stranger passing by on the road, "and the poor," someone I know, because he was "without covering," he implies here: Let these and other consequences happen to me. Not only did I not despise those who were poorly clothed, but I even provided them with some clothes, and so he then says, "If his loins have not blessed me," because I covered them when they were naked and this was the occasion when he blessed me. He shows the reason for this saying, "and if he was not warmed with the fleece of my sheep," by the clothing offered to him, let the same punishment happen to me. (v. 21) Another impediment to mercy is the confidence one has in one's own power. This seems to make a man think he can harm others and especially people beneath him with impunity, and he excludes this from himself saying, "If I have raised my hand against the orphan, "to cause him to suffer, "even when they saw me at the gate," the place of judgment, "elevated," as one more powerful. It is just that a man should be deprived of the limbs which he uses for injustice, and so he speaks not only of the loss of his hand as a punishment, but also the arm to which the hand is attached, and of the shoulder to which the arm is connected, and so he says, "let my shoulder fall from its joint and let my arm be crushed with its bones," if I have abused my hand by using it to oppress the poor. He shows then why although he was in a higher place in society he did not raise his hand against orphans. Even though he did not deliver them because of men, yet he did deliver them because of God whose judgments he feared, and so he then says, "For I always feared God like the swelling of a wave over me." He speaks using the comparison of those sailing on the sea, who, when the swelling waves rise over the height of the ship, fear that the ship will be submerged by them. In the same way he feared divine threats, like waves swelling up. Also he submitted to divine authority, which forbids the oppression of orphans, and so he says, "and his weight," the authority of God who protects the orphans, "I could not bear," without bending my will to him.