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Job

Chapter Thirty Three:



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

- Job 19:25 -

Eliud Exhorts Job to Repentance

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 THREE: ELIUD EXHORTS JOB TO REPENTANCE

The First Lesson: What Job should Confess

1 Hear then Job my words and listen my speeches. 2 Behold, I have opened my mouth, let my tongue will speak in my mouth. 3 My words are in a simple heart and my lips will speak a pure opinion. 4 The spirit of God made me and the breath of the Most High gave me life. 5 If you can, answer me and hold your ground before my face. 6 Behold, God made both you and me and I too was formed from the same clay. 7 Let my miracle not terrify you and let my eloquence not prove a burden for you. 8 Therefore, you have spoken in my hearing and I heard the sound of your words: 9 I am clean and without fault, without stain and there is no evil in me. 10 Since he has found grievances in me, therefore he thought that I am his enemy. 11 He put my feet in the stocks, and he watched all my movements. 12a It is in this then in which you are not justified.

Because God does not immediately and finally damn man, but warns him many times, Eliud adds, "Behold, all these things," the instruction through dreams and rebuke through pains and healing, "God works in three ways," i.e. many times for as long as he thinks them useful. But he uses the number three to conform to human usage in which men are usually warned or summoned three times. God does this not only for one, but for all those in need of it, and so he says, "for each one," whom he sees must be instructed and chided. He assigns the usefulness of this saying, "to call their souls back from corruption," which expresses freedom from evil, "and to enlighten them with the light of the living," which expresses the attainment of good things. Each of these can be applied to corporeal or spiritual goods. When he says here "three ways," this should refer to the two second modes of God speaking. For about the first he has said that, "he will not repeat it a second time." (v.14) He introduces this to show the reason why sinners are sometimes sustained in prosperity and are not immediately damned.

Since it seemed to him that he had spoken effectively, he invites Job to listen quietly to the things which remain. He says, "Listen, Job," in your heart, "and hear me," with your ears, "be silent while I speak," and do not interrupt me. Lest he seem to inhibit his ability to answer he says, "If however you have something to say, answer me," and as though he desires his answer he adds, "speak." Then, he shows the cause of his desire saying, "I want you to be known as just." He says this to show that he does not intend to humiliate him. Since he did not believe that he was just he then says, "But if you do not have," something to say on behalf of your justice, "hear me, be silent, and I will teach you wisdom," of which you are ignorant.

END OF JOB CHAPTER 33

Therefore, after he has suggested the words of God which free him, Eliud uses his own words to describe the manner of human liberation saying, "He will invoke God in prayer," for it is not enough for an angel to speak for him, but to be freed he must also pray for it himself. Or this argument can be connected in another way. For because he had shown above that man cannot lament that he cannot place his case in the presence of God, since an angel proposes it there for him efficaciously (v.23), now he shows that he too can place it there for himself in prayer. To show that this is as effective as the first way he says, "and he (God) will be pleased by him (man)," according to the words of the prophet Joel, "He is kind and merciful and placated about evil." (2:13) From this there follows in man a confidence in thinking about God with some spiritual joy, and so he says. "and he (man) will see his face," that is, he will consider his goodness, imperfectly in the present life and perfectly in the future life, "in a shout of joy," in joy which is in some way inexplicable. "And," so, "he (God) will render his justice to men," because he will reward him for his merits, after he has removed the impediment of sin. But this is not possible unless man humbly recognizes and confesses his sin, and so he says, "He will consider man," as if spontaneously offering himself for the confession of sin, and so he continues, "and he will say, 'I have sinned.'" So one does not think that he has said this from humility he adds, "and I have truly perverted what is right." He says this against Job because Job had said, "I have not sinned and my eye lingers on bitter things." (17:2) In his confession he will not lament about the gravity of the punishment, and so he says, "and I did not receive the punishment I merited," as if to say: I merited a graver punishment, and he says this against what Job had said, "If only my sins were weighed in which I merited anger and so on." (6:2) He shows the fruit of humility saying, "For he freed my soul," in confessing his sin, "from going to destruction," which refers to death, corporeal or spiritual. He also wants to attain further goods and so he says, "but in living my soul will see the light," which is either the corporeal light or the spiritual light of wisdom.

The text has said already that Eliud was angry against Job and his friends (32:2-3). After he has denounced the laziness of the friends of Job, now he begins to speak against Job himself, and therefore, he first gets his attention saying, "Hear, then, Job, my words," because I now intend to answer you. He shows that he will weigh each word very carefully saying, "and listen to my speeches," for he will not say anything in vain. So that Job does not ask the reason why he did not speak before he says, "Behold, I have opened my mouth," as if to say: Before when I was silent, I had kept my mouth closed out of reverence for my elders, since now they are deficient, necessity compels me to speak. So he says, "my tongue in my mouth will speak," as if to say: I will not follow what others say, but I will speak my own ideas. Since Job in what has gone before has accused his friends of afflicting him and confounding him with words, (19:2) Eliud shows this is not true with him saying, "My words are in a simple heart," as if to say: I do not speak to falsely condemn or to ridicule, but to show the truth with a simple heart. Since Job had accused the other three men of being, "fabricators of a lie and worshippers of false dogmas," (13:4) he excludes this from himself saying, "and my lips will speak a pure opinion," without the mixture of any falsity or error. He shows the source of such confidence in clearly explaining the truth saying, "The Spirit of God made me," and therefore, it is no wonder that he moves his creature and perfects his product, and he explains this continuing, "and the breath of the Most High gave me life," for he moved and perfected me for the works of life, and the principal one of these is the understanding of the truth. Lest he seem to have said this as a prejudice to discourage Job from answering one speaking from divine inspiration he says, "If you can, answer me," what I will say against you, "and hold your ground before my face," so that you also can raise objection against me if I say anything which displeases you. Lest Job scorn to dispute with him because of his own reputation for wisdom and his youth, he excludes this saying, "Behold, God made both you and me," so from the Creator's point of view both of us have the same hope of inquiring into truth. On the part of matter, the same impediment applies to each one, and so he says, "and I too was formed from the same clay," whose coarseness darkens the light of truth. But Eliud saw one could anger him and that it was because of a miracle that such great wisdom and eloquence was given to a young man and this is sufficient reason to dispute against a very wise old man. Therefore he sustains the fact implying this was given to him miraculously, saying, "Yet let my miracle not terrify you," so that you do not dare answer one who has obtained wisdom miraculously, "and let my eloquence not prove a burden for you," so that you are astonished because of it.

After he has said these things as an introduction, he strengthens the arguments which he intends to use against Job, and so he says, "Therefore you have spoken in my hearing," as if to say: You cannot excuse yourself by saying that you did not say this," and I heard the sound of your words," for I listened attentively. First, he had noted in the words of Job that he had said that he was immune from sin (13:6 and 16:18) and so he says, "I am clean," from the impurity of the flesh, "and without fault," caused by the sin of omission; "without stain," from grave sins which are against God like idolatry and other sins of this sort; "and there is no evil in me," which would cause me to wound my neighbors unjustly. Second, he notes in his words that he accused God of unfair judgment. Unfair judgment usually proceeds from the hatred of the one judging, and as to this he recalls that Job had said, "Since he has found grievances in me, therefore he thought that I am his enemy." In Chapter Thirteen, Job asked in question form, "Why do you hide your face and think of me as your enemy?" (v.24) But he did not say, "He has found grievances in me," and so this is an addition of Eliud to give a bad interpretation to the words of Job. Indeed, the hatred of a judge seems to be just if, sure of the malice of another, he has hatred in punishing his fault. But if from light grievances, the judge is provoked to hatred at another, his hatred will be injustice. In just this way he interpreted Job to have said that God thought of him as an enemy. Second, a judge is unfair if he takes away from someone the ability to mount a just defense. Expressing this he says, "he put my feet in the stocks," for he bound me as if to impede me from my works. Third, a judge is unfair when he gathers certain small faults together to condemn someone, and expressing this he says, "he watched all of my movements," as if spying on him in each and every work. Job did not say these things to show the unfairness of the divine judge, but he was speaking metaphorically as he explained, "Understand my riddles with your ears." (13:17) Because this second point excludes the first, he then says, "It is in this then in which you are not justified," as if to say: You cannot say you are just because the very fact that you impute injustice to God shows your injustice.

Since Job seemed to lament not only that God had not spoken to him, but also that he could not approach to have a discussion with God and to plead his case before him, (cf. 33:3) Eliud therefore wants to make a satisfactory answer to this question. Although the approach to God does not clearly lie open to a man, the angels still are the mediators between God and men, who propose the justice of man to God not to teach him, but to help men in their desires. So there is no lack in man if he is unable to approach the divine throne through his own powers without aid to propose the justice of his cause to him. To prove this he says, "If there should be for him," for the afflicted man, "an angel who speaks," intercedes, and lest it be feared that one angel would not suffice to intercede for all, he then says, "one of the thousands [according to what the text already said, "can one number his hosts?" (25:3)] to announce the justice of the man," to propose in the presence of God whatever is just on the part of a man. "He (God) will have mercy on him," on the man afflicted, "and he will say," that is, he will order the angel, "Deliver him," for just as he is the one who brings forward the justice of man in the presence of God, so also he is the executor of the divine mercy in the presence of men. He then explains that from which he must be freed saying, "from going down into corruption," to death. He then shows that this freedom pleases God when he adds, speaking in the person of God, "I have found how I am propitiated to him," because something of the justice I was seeking appears in man and because of this I can have mercy on him. Since Job had said, "My flesh is clothed with corruption," (7:5) as if he could not be restored, he excludes this saying, "His flesh has been consumed by punishments," as if to say: This is not injurious to my power, and so "let him return to the days of his youth," i.e. let him recover the strength like a young man.

Then he discusses the fact that God can also speak and correct man through the sickness of the body. He first notes sensible pain here, and so he says, "He also chides," a man for past sins, "by pain," which is the corporeal pain which comes from sickness. So he says, "on his bed," according to the Psalm, "Upon his bed of pain." (Ps. 11:4) Second, he notes the weakness of the sick when he says, "and he makes all of his bones grow feeble," when he destroys the strength which consists in his bones. Third, he places the loss of appetite when he says, "Bread," which is common food, "becomes abominable to him during his life," while he still lived, because of sickness, "and the food of his soul, which he desired before, becomes abominable," which refers to other foods which are desired in different ways by different people. Fourth, he places leanness when he says, "His flesh will waste away," that is, will fail, "and," consequently, "the bones which were hidden," by flesh, "will be laid bare," because they will appear to be covered only by skin. Fifth, he places the danger and fear of death saying, "His soul will approach corruption," which refers to his life, which is lived because of his soul. So he adds, "and the life of that man will approach to the dangers of death," to causes bringing death.

Note he has proposed these things to answer the lament of Job that God does not answer each of his questions in detail. For he wanted to prove by the preceding things that God had spoken to him in three ways: first by natural reason, as he does to all men, second by accusing him in dreams, for he had already said, "You will terrify me with dreams and you will strike me with horror in visions." (7:14); third, by illness, as he had already said, "Now my soul droops within me." (30:16) In the same way one must consider that Eliud, like the other three, believed that the weaknesses come to men from sin, yet not principally as a punishment, like the other three said, but more as a correction.

The Second Lesson: God teaches Men in many Ways

12b I will answer you that God is greater than man. 13 You contend against him because he will not answer all your arguments. 14 God speaks once and he does not repeat the same thing a second time 15 in a dream, in a vision of the night. When sleep rushes on man and they sleep in bed, 16 then he opens the ears of men and he educates and instructs them in his discipline 17 to turn a man aside from what he has done and to free him from pride. 18 He rescues his soul from corruption and his life so that he does not perish from the sword. 19 He also chides by pain on his bed, and he makes all his bones grow feeble. 20 Bread becomes abominable to him during his life and food of the soul which he desired before becomes abominable. 21 His flesh will waste away and the bones which were hidden will be laid bare. 22 His soul will approach corruption and the life of that man will approach the dangers of death. 23 If there should be one angel who speaks for him, one of the thousands to announce the justice of that man, he will have mercy on him and he will say: 24 Deliver him from going down into corruption, and I have found how I am propitiated to him. 25 His flesh has been consumed by punishments, let him return to the days of his youth. 26 He will invoke God in prayer and he will be pleased by him and he will see his face in joy and he will render his justice to man. 27 He will consider men and he will say: I have sinned, I have truly perverted what is right; and I did not receive the punishment I merited. 28 For he freed my soul from going to destruction but in living my soul might see light. 29 Behold, God works all these things in three ways for each one 30 to call their souls back from corruption and to enlighten them with the light of the living. 31 Listen, Job, and hear me, be silent while I speak. 32 If, however, you have something to say, answer me, speak; I want you to be known as just. 33 But if you have not, hear me, be silent and I will teach you wisdom.

Eliud has already proposed those things which he intended to dispute with Job. Since Job, before he had spoken the words Eliud cited (vv.10,11) had said, "I desire to dispute with God," it seems unfitting to recall someone who desires eagerly to take up the dispute with someone higher to dispute with an inferior. Before Eliud begins to argue with Job about these things, he reproaches him with the very fact that he desired to argue with God. First, it is a mark of great presumption to challenge someone superior to debate. So he says, "I will answer you," your desire according to which you wish to dispute with God, "that God is greater than man," and so it is presumptuous for man to wish to debate with God. In this he would justly accuse Job if Job wanted to dispute with God to contradict him as if he were an equal. Job however wished to dispute with God to learn as a student does with a master. So he said in Chapter Twenty Three, "I will fill my mouth with rebukes to learn how he answers me." (v.4) Yet Eliud interpreted this as though Job spoke contentiously against God, complaining that he was not answering him, and so he then says, "You contend against him because he will not answer all your arguments." He wanted to take this from these preceding works of Job, and from what he said in Chapter Nineteen, "Behold, I will shout out violently in my suffering and no one will hear. I will cry out and there was no one to judge." (v.27) Job did not say these words and others like them in a contentious manner, but because he desired to know the reasoning of divine wisdom.

To refute the preceding words of Job which Eliud interpreted as having been spoken contentiously, Eliud shows that God does not necessarily have to answer every single word posed to him by man, but he speaks sufficiently to each one for his instruction, and so he then says, "God speaks once," sufficiently for the instruction of man. So then he does not have to answer each of the man's questions in turn, and therefore he says, "and he does not repeat the same thing a second time," since to repeat what he did sufficiently would be superfluous. He shows how God speaks to man then saying, "in a dream, in a vision of the night." There can also be another meaning, so that when he says, "God speaks only once," to man, it refers to the instruction of the mind which is by the light of natural reason, as Psalm Four, "Many say: 'Who shows good things to us?'" and as if to respond: "The light of your face shines upon us, O Lord." (vv. 6 and 7), in this light one discerns good from evil. Since natural reason remains unchangeable in men, and as a result it is not necessary to renew it, he therefore says, "and he does not repeat the same thing a second time." Then he shows another way by which God speaks to man, which is the imaginary vision in the apparitions of dreams, and so he says, "in a dream, in the visions of the night." This can be referred to prophetic revelation, according to Numbers, "If anyone will be a prophet of the Lord among you, I will speak to him either in dream or in vision," (12:6) or this can be referred to ordinary dreams which Eliud believed come from God.

He explains then the manner and the order of the dreams. First, he touches on the natural cause when he says, "when sleep rushes on men," which happens when the external senses have been immobilized by vapors ascending to the source of sensing. Second, he places the disposition on the part of the human will when he continues, "and they sleep in bed," because men experience dreams which are especially ordered and filled with meaning when they sleep restfully. To the sick then dreams appear distorted because of lack of rest so Daniel says, "Your dream and the visions in your head, which you had on your bed mean this: You, O king, began to think on your bed and so on." (2:28) Third, he places the divine action in the one sleeping, which is characterized first by the fact that, when the exterior senses have been immobilized in deep sleep and a man is resting quietly in bed, a certain ability is divinely given to a man to perceive divine instruction because his spirit is not preoccupied with exterior things, and so he says, "then he opens the ears of men." By "ears" he fittingly enough expresses the ability to perceive divine instruction in dreams because he speaks about this kind of instruction like a kind of language because it does not result from the experience of things themselves, but in signs as is also true in language. Once the ability to hear him has been given, it is fitting that he can teach, and so he continues, "and he educates them and instructs them in discipline." Discipline is taken here for the instruction which tells a man what must be done and avoided, not for the knowledge of the speculative sciences, which are usually not revealed in a dream. So he says, "to turn a man aside from what he has done." For man is frequently corrected in dreams for sins he has committed. Since the pride is the root of sin because by it one holds the commandments of God in contempt, he then says, "and to free him from pride." Once man is free from fault, he fittingly escapes punishments. He shows he escapes two kinds of punishments. First, with respect to the spiritual punishment of the soul, "He rescues his soul from corruption," caused by the disorders of the powers of the soul. Second, concerning corporeal punishment, hence he says, "and his life," the corporeal one, "so that he does not perish by the sword," when he is punished for his sin. Or both can refer to bodily death, which is sometimes produced by interior corruption, as when someone dies from sickness which God sends on him for sin. This sometimes happens from the violence of the sword.