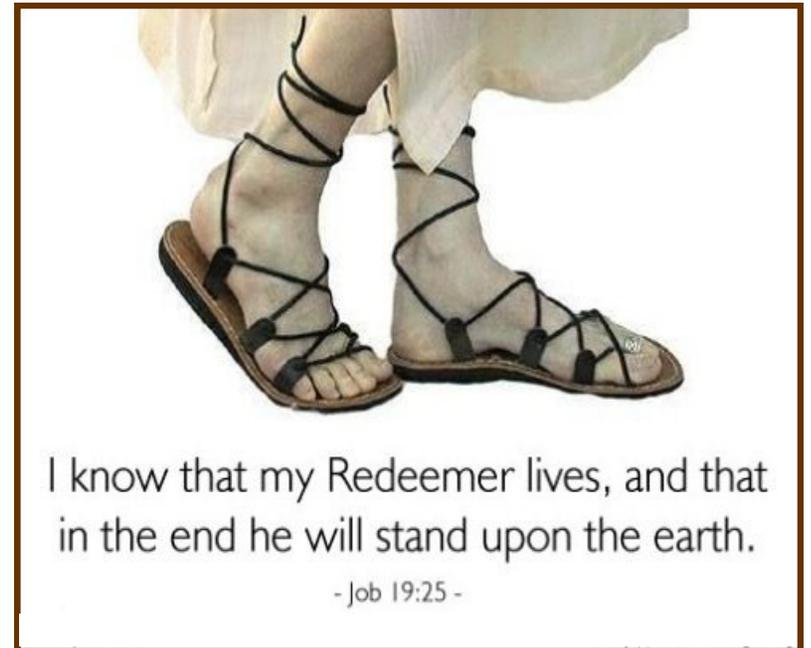


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Job

Chapter Twenty Nine:



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

- Job 19:25 -

Job Continues Recalling the Past

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 TWENTY NINE: JOB CONTINUES RECALLING THE PAST

The Lesson: The Happy Days of Job

1 Job again took up his comparison and said: 2 Who grants that I might be as in the months of old? As in the days when the Lord watched over me, 3 when his lamp shone over my head and in his light I was walking in darkness, 4 as I was in the days of my youth. When God lived in my tent in private, 5 when the Almighty was with me and my sons round about me; 6 when I washed my feet in butter and the rock poured out rivers of oil for me; 7 when I went to the gate of the city and in the street they placed a judgment seat for me. 8 The young men saw me and hid themselves, and the aged rose and stood. 9 The city elders refrained from talking and they put their fingers over their mouths. 10 Generals governed their tongues and their tongues cleaved to the roof of their mouths. 11 The ear which heard, blessed me and the eye which saw, rendered testimony for me, 12 because I freed the poor man who cried out and the orphan who had none to help him. 13 The blessing of the man perishing came upon me, and I consoled the heart of the widow. 14 I have been clothed in justice and I have clothed myself like a garment and my judgment was like a diadem for me. 15 I was the eye for the blind and a foot for the lame. 16 I was a father to the poor and the case of which I was ignorant, I diligently investigated. 17 I broke the jaws of the impious and I tore his prey from his teeth. 18 I said: I will die in my little nest and like a palm tree, I will multiply my days. 19 My root is open near the water, and dew will remain on my harvest. 20 My glory always will be renewed, and my bow will be restored to my hand. 21 Those who heard me, awaited the judgment, and kept silence attentive to my counsels. 22 They dared add nothing to my words, and my eloquence fell on them drop by drop. 23 They waited for me like the rain, and their mouths were opened as to the evening shower. 24 If ever I laughed at them, they did not believe; and the light of my countenance was not cast down to the ground. 25 If I wished to go to them, I used to sit in the first place; and when I used to sit like a king surrounded by his army, I was still a consoler for those who mourn.

Since in what preceded Job had shown in the universal why it is evident that it is not against divine justice that the evil prosper and the good to whom greater spiritual things are given sometimes suffer want of temporal prosperity in this world, and he shows this now more clearly in his own case using himself as an example. He intends by this also to refute their opinion when they asserted that he was suffering adversities for sin. First he calls to mind his past prosperity which he used virtuously; then the greatness of the adversity into which he had fallen, (c.30) and finally he demonstrates his innocence in many ways. (c.31)

After he had described what sort of person he was in judgments and counsels, he shows, as a consequence, what sort of person he was in ordinary associations with men. First he shows that he was gracious, because when he was absent they missed his presence, and so he says, "They waited for me like the rain," which refreshes men. When he was present they were consoled by the sight of him and his words, and so he says, "and their mouths," their hearts, "were opened," toward me to receive encouragement, and he expresses this saying, "as to the evening shower," which give refreshment after the heat of the day. Second, he shows that he was moderate in his conversation, and not dissipated by joy, and so he says, "If I ever laughed at them," showing some signs of joy, "they did not believe," that I have surrendered myself to laughter. Likewise, he was not depressed by sorrow, and so he says, "and the light of my countenance was not cast down to the ground." For men depressed by mourning usually cast their eyes down to the ground. Third, he shows that he was not immoderate in honors, because he did not even desire them, and so he says, "If I wished to go to them," which I did not do easily, "I used to sit in the first place," for I was honored among them. Nevertheless, he did not become arrogant in honors, and so he says, "and when I used to sit like a king surrounded by his army," with all admiring me from here and there, "I was still a consoler for those who mourned," and did not hold them in contempt.

END OF JOB CHAPTER 29

Because of all these good works, he was confident that his prosperity would endure. He describes the continuity of his prosperity first in his own person, and so he says, "And I said, 'I will die in my little nest,'" because I hoped from my past merits that I would quietly die in my house, not exiled from my house, nor even in a troubled house. Nor yet did he believe that he should worry about a timely death, and so he says, "like a palm tree," which lives a very long time, "I will multiply my days," in the great length of my life. Second he describes the continuity of his prosperity as to riches, and he describes their increase saying, "My root is open out near the water." For trees which have roots near the waters often produce an abundance of fruit. So by this expression he refers to the increase of temporal fruits. The fruits of a man happen sometimes to increase, but because of some impediments preventing him, he is unable to harvest them, and to exclude this he says, "and dew will remain in my harvest." For in hot countries the harvesters cannot work in a field to harvest, because of the stifling character of the summer, but a cloud of dew gives them coolness so that they are not impeded from the harvest as Isaiah said, "Like a cloud of dew on the days of the harvest." (18:4) Third, he describes the enduring character of his reputation saying, "my glory always will be renewed," by good works which he proposed to multiply. Fourth, he describes the endurance of his power saying, "and my bow will be restored in my hand." "Bow" here means power, for Eastern people use such weapons in wars.

As in what precedes he has described both the severity (vv.8-10) and the mercy (vv. 11-16) which he showed in judgment, he shows now in the third how he also used wisdom. First, he used wisdom in judgments, and expressing this he says, "Those who heard me," because they were subject to my judgment, "awaited the judgment," namely mine, believing that they would hear something very wise. As to counsel he says, "and kept silence, attentive to my counsels," waiting for him and listening eagerly. After I had given them my counsel, they were happy with it, and so he says, "They dared to add nothing to my words," because of the great wisdom which they valued. Not only did they firmly keep my counsel, but they were also consoled in it, perceiving it to be efficacious to attain their proposed end, and so he says, "and my eloquence fell on them drop by drop," i.e., it cooled them like drops of water.

He seems to have satisfactorily answered the argument of Baldath (c.26) he proceeded to demonstrate his proposition. So after he had declared his intention since Sophar remained silent, (c.27), he waited for one of the others to speak. Since everyone was silent, he resumed his speech again, and so the text says, "Job again took up his comparison," because he was about to speak using metaphor. "And said: Who grants me," a question which is posed to show a wish more than to formulate a petition, "that I might be as in the months of old," and live in prosperity as I did once? Since he did not attribute this prosperity to either fortune or his own strength, but to divine aid, he continues, "As in the days when the Lord watched over me," protecting me against adverse things and also directing me to good things. In some things he had led me to good effects even beyond my own intention, and to express this he says, "when his lamp," his providence, "shown over my head," for he directed my mind toward many good things which my mind did not attain. In certain respects, however, he was directed by God as though instructed by him about what he ought to do, so he then says, "in his light," by his instruction, "I was walking," I was proceeding, "in darkness," in doubts. To answer the objection that this is due to him from the merit of past justice, he adds, "as I was in the days of my youth," when I as yet could not have merited such great prosperity.

Then he explains the goods of his past state one by one, and begins from the most excellent one, the divine intimacy which he knew in his prayer and contemplation. So he says, "When God lived in my tent in private," that is, I felt the presence of God as long as I was praying and meditating in private in my tent, which is characteristic of contemplation. As to action he continues, "when the Almighty was with me," as though cooperating with me in doing good. Then he describes his prosperity as to his posterity when he says, "and my boys were round about me." For in fact the sons of a young father must be boys. Further he continues on to the abundance of things which concern the enjoyment of life when he says, "when I washed my feet in butter." Among the ancients, riches consisted primarily in cattle, (*pecus*) from which money (*pecunia*) takes its name, according to Augustine. Among cattle products the most precious seems to be butter, which is the fat of the milk. He metaphorically shows his affluence in this through washing of the feet, like someone who said he had such a surplus supply of some precious liquid that he washed his feet in it. As butter is most valuable among animal products, so oil is prized among the products of the earth. The olives trees which usually have the best oil generally grow in stony and sandy places, and so he says, "and the rock poured out rivers of oil for me," where he shows the abundance and the goodness of the fruit.

Then he explains the grandeur of his past glory when he says, "When I went to the gate of the city." This tells us he had judicial authority, because among the ancients, judgments were rendered at the gates. To show that he was not one of the petty judges, he then says, "and in the street they placed a judgment seat for me." By this he is shown to have had a unique dignity. He shows consequently the authority of his judgment, first by the attitude taken by the young men when he says, "the young men" who are often prone to sin, "saw me and hid themselves," as though they dreaded my judgment. Second as to the old he says, "The aged rose and stood," for they were subject to my judgment. He had authority to judge not only youths, but old men. Third the governors of the city showed respect for his judgment, first because they broke off a conversation already begun when he wished to speak, and so he says, "The city elders refrained from talking." Second because they did not dare to interrupt him while he was speaking, and so he says, "and they put their fingers to their mouths." Fourth, the generals of wars who are usually more audacious and more prompt to speak, still did not dare to speak presumptuously and boisterously in his presence. So he says, "Generals governed their tongues," speaking plainly and humbly. Sometimes they were so awestruck that they did not dare to speak at all, and so he says, "and their tongues cleaved to the roof of their mouths," and made them incapable of speech.

Since men of such stern authority are usually feared rather than loved by the people, he shows that the people loved him. Since the mark of the magnanimous man is that he can guard his authority toward the great and yet stoop to the lesser men, he then says, "The ear which heard," from others when my glory and my judgment were proclaimed, did not hate or envy me, but "blessed me," thought me happy and desired happiness for me. This expresses the attitude of those not present. As for those present he says, "and the eye which saw," my glory and judgment "rendered testimony for me," about my virtue to others. This is because of the works of mercy which I was doing. He shows this first regarding the poor, and so he says, "because I freed," from the hand of the oppressor, "the poor man who cried out," who loudly complained. Second, as to orphans, and so he says, "and the orphan who had none to help him," because he had lost his father. Third as to men who live in danger, and so he says, "The blessing of the man perishing came upon me," that is, the man who had been helped by me in danger, blessed me. Fourth as to widows, and so he says, "and I have consoled the heart of the widow," because she had lost the consolation of a husband.

But he did not have mercy in judgment in the wise as to forsake justice, and so he adds, "I have been clothed in justice," i.e. justice was apparent everywhere in my trials: For a piece of clothing surrounds a man on all sides. To show that he was not coerced to do justice, but did so freely, he then says, "and I have clothed myself," by my own will, putting on justice "like a garment" protecting and adorning me all over. Just as in combat a crown is given to the victors, so also the judge when he gives victory to justice in his judgment merits a crown, and so he continues, "and my judgment was like a diadem for me," as if to say: I am invested with my judgment like a diadem. To show how he could preserve mercy together with justice he says, "I was an eye for the blind," for I instructed simple men how to proceed in their business and not suffer detriment due to ignorance. Because not only did he give counsel to the ignorant, but also help to the powerless, he says, "and a foot to the lame," for I gave aid to the man who could not prosper in his business that he might prosper. He also cared for those who were defenseless, and so he says, "I was a father to the poor," for I protected and supported them. Sometimes there are those who wound the poor, the powerless, and the simple calumniously by fraud. He shows a diligent interest against the calumnious process of evil men, and so he says, "And the case of which I was ignorant, I diligently investigated," so that there would lie no fraud hidden there. Some oppress the poor by violence, and devour them so to speak by robbing from them. Job destroyed the violence of men like this with his power, and so he continues, "I broke the jaws of the impious," because I destroyed the greed of violence so they could not rob again," and I tore his prey from his teeth," because he compelled them to restore what they had already taken in theft.