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Job

Chapter Ten:



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

- Job 19:25 -

*The Special Problem of the
Suffering of the Just*

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 TEN: THE SPECIAL PROBLEM OF THE SUFFERING OF THE JUST

The First Lesson: Job Returns to Himself: The Creator does not deny His Creature

1 My soul is weary of my life, I will unleash my eloquence against myself, I will speak from the bitterness of my soul. 2 I will say to God: Do not condemn me. Tell me why you judge me so. 3 Does it seem good to you to calumniate me, to chastise me, the work of your hands, and to aid the plot of the wicked? 4 Are your eyes made of flesh? Or do you see like a man sees? 5 Are your days like the days of a man? And are your years like man's time 6 that you should interrogate me about my evildoing and examine my sin? 7 Know that I have done nothing wicked since there is no one who can take me from your hand. 8 It was your hands that made me, they fashioned me wholly round about, and so do you cast me down unexpectedly? 9 Remember, I beseech you, that you have made me like clay, and will you grind me to dust? 10 Did you not pour me out like milk and curdle me like cheese? 11 With skin and flesh you clothed me; with bones and sinew knit me together. 12 You gave me life and mercy and your visitation guarded my spirit. 13 Although you hide these things in your heart, yet I know you remember everything.

***“Although you hide these things in your heart,
I know that you still remember everything.”***

(Job speaking to God)

But since those against whom he disputes did not assert the immortality of the soul in that it survived after death, he still speaks expressing their position. The passage is better explained according to the literal sense, so that the whole text refers to the body which is buried in the ground and converted into dust. So he says, "to a land of gloom," to express the very property of earth which is opaque in itself. Although it is opaque considered in itself, those who inhabit it are illuminated by the light of the air covering the earth. The dead, however, do not enjoy that sort of light and so he says, "covered with the mist of death," as if to say: Because of death, someone does not enjoy the light after death which the living enjoy. Sometimes it happens that although some living person does not enjoy the light surrounding the earth, yet while living deep in the hidden caverns of the earth, he enjoys things according to his appetite and considers truths according to their intellect. But the dead cannot do this, and so he says, "the land of unhappiness," because of the lack of all things desirable and "of shadows" because the consideration of truth is lacking. Among things enjoyed by the living, human society is special with proper order according to which certain people rule, others are under them and others serve them. The dead are deprived of this society and so he continues, "whereas the shade of death," as if to say: There are nothing but shadows among the dead from the point of view of the living. For Wisdom says, "Specters who appeared sad made them tremble with fear." (17:4) "No order" because the condition of the dead is like it without honor or dignity. "But everlasting terror dwells "with respect to the living for whom the dead are a horror as if to say: There is nothing in the state of the dead except what men shudder at and this will be eternally true for them if they do not return to life.

Therefore, Job shows in the investigation of the causal explanation for his trial that this is not caused by some unjust person into whose hands the earth has been given (9:24 ff.), nor by God persecuting him on a false charge, (v.3) nor God looking for a fault (v.4), nor by God punishing sins (v.14), nor by God enjoying the punishments. (v.18) As a result, the cause of his pains still remains in doubt. Job pursues all these things to lead the friends to conclude that there must of necessity be another life in which the just are rewarded and the wicked punished. If this position is not posited no cause can be given for the suffering of the just who certainly sometimes are troubled in this world.

END OF JOB CHAPTER 10

Job earlier proposed that both the innocent and the unjust are assailed by trials in this world, and touched upon one reason for the punishment of the innocent which he could think of, i.e. that the earth, as if forsaken by God, had been exposed to the almost evil will of an iniquitous power which punishes the innocent at will. He showed that this explanation was not true because there was something clearly unfitting in that argument. Then he asked who was the one who punishes the innocent and why. He intends now to pursue this question here. Before proceeding to this investigation, however, he shows from what point of view he is speaking. For he is speaking in the person of the afflicted man according to the conceptions which sadness supplies him. So he first speaks about the weariness which he suffers in this life because of the tribulations which is suffering. These render life itself wearisome in proportion to their depth. For although living is enjoyable in itself, living in anguish is wearisome. So he says, "My soul is weary of my life." For just as a man who finds his life enjoyable chooses to live, so a man who finds life burdensome tries to deprive himself of life. For this reason he adds, "I will unleash my eloquence against myself." Something is against someone which is destructive to him. A man therefore speaks against himself when he chooses to be deprived of life. But he clearly says, "I will unleash," for many times a man suffers some disturbances in his heart because of passion either of sorrow, desire, anger or the like, but he still controls all these movements by reason so that he does not express them externally by word. However, when his reason wishes to show what it is suffering internally, it produces the hidden disturbances in words, and then reason is said to unleash eloquence which was previously kept hidden internally. To express this he says, "I will speak from the bitterness of my soul," as if to say: The words which I will reveal externally show internal bitterness, giving us to understand that he speaks in the persona of the bitter man. But lest this unleashing of speech again be interpreted as reason being overcome by sorrow, he adds, "I will say to God: Do not condemn me." For when reason is overcome by passion, man murmurs against God and at times goes so far as blasphemy. But when reason remains rightly ordered amid tribulations, one submits himself to God and expects the cure to come from him saying, "Do not condemn me." At the same time, he addresses the resolution of the question. Since the author had asked above (9:24) what was the cause of the punishment of the innocent in the world, he here at last confesses that God is the author of punishment when he begs that he not be condemned by him, as I Kings says, "The Lord brings death and gives life," (2:6) the text by the heresy of the Manichees is refuted.

With these premises and supposing that God is the author of punishment, he inquires about the cause of his own punishment saying to God, "Tell me why you judge me so," i.e., help me understand the reason why I am punished by you. For he knew that the investigation of reason cannot arrive at the goal of truth unless God divinely teaches it. Man must know the cause of his punishment, either to correct himself or to endure the trials with more patience. He proceeds to investigate the question with a kind of disjunction: It is necessary that one who suffers is either innocent or a sinner. He first proceeds supposing that he is innocent. Because we come to the knowledge of divine things through human ones, he proposes two ways the innocent are sometimes condemned by human judgment.

The first way is because of the malice of the one meting out the punishment. Punishments are inflicted on the innocent in three ways from this cause. Sometimes they heap calumnies upon the innocent through cunning. On this theme he says, "Does it seem good to you to calumniate me?" Sometimes, however, they oppress them by violence, and he expresses this saying, "and to chastise me, the work of your hands?" Sometimes they do not cause the innocent to suffer for their own interest, but since they inordinately love evil men, they even help them in the persecution of the innocent. Therefore he adds, "and to aid the plot of the wicked?" Consider carefully, however, that sometimes one and the same thing can be both good and evil in different natures. For a dog to become angry is something good; but for a man to become angry is something evil. No one in his right mind entertains any doubt as to whether God does anything from an evil intention. For there cannot be anything evil in the highest good. But there may be something evil in man which belongs to divine goodness, e.g., not being merciful inasmuch as mercy implies passion, is something blameworthy in man. Yet divine goodness requires it because of its perfection. It is clear that the three actions cited, i.e. to calumniate, to chastise and to aid the counsels of evil men are evil in man. So he calls into the question whether they can be goods in God. He does not ask then, "Do you calumniate me or do you oppress?" but "Does it seem good to you to calumniate me and to chastise," as if supposing as a certainty that God never does anything unless it seems good to him, and this is truly good. Likewise note here that no one imputes to anyone those things which exist naturally to fault or evil. For it is natural that each thing destroy its contrary, and so God, too, who is good in highest degree, hates those things which happen contrary to him and destroys them. Psalm 5 expresses this, "You hate all who do evil and you will destroy them." (v.:7) If then men were not made by God but by some contrary principle, as the Manichees falsely claimed, it would seem good that God would chastise men on their own account. To exclude this possibility, he does not simply say, "to oppress me," but he adds, "the work of your hands." Also, it would seem good that God would fulfill the wills of the just. However, those who will to calumniate and oppress innocent men are not just but wicked and especially if they should will this not from ignorance or accidentally but from deliberate, premeditated choice. So, since he supposes himself to be innocent in the first part of the debate, it follows that those who wish to oppress him or to calumniate him from deliberation are evil. He therefore clearly says, "and to aid the plot of the wicked?"

This too can be explained in two ways. In one way it can be interpreted to express the hell (*infernus*) to which the souls of all men, even the souls of the just before Christ, descended. Although the just did not suffer sensible pains there, but only darkness, the others suffer both pains and darkness. But since Job had spoken as if it were doubtful whether he himself was just or a sinner as his friends unjustly accused him (in fact, he was just) he describes hell in a way common to both the good and the wicked. If hell is considered in this common sense, it is called a "land of gloom," because it lacks the clarity of the divine vision. It is said to be "covered with the mist of death," because of original sin which is the mist leading to death. It is said to be a "land of unhappiness" because of the punishments which the condemned suffer. It is called "land of shadows" because of the obscurities of actual sins which entangle the wicked. A "shadow" is said to be there, i.e. a likeness "of death" because they are afflicted it is like a perpetual death. There is said to be "confusion" there either because of the confusion of minds which the damned suffer or because of the fact that the order is not observed there which is observed here. Here fire burns and gives light but not so there. There "one dwells in everlasting terror" because although they are always in pain from present punishments there, they still always fear future ones.

There is no one who delights in the torments of another who is so cruel that he would give him at least a brief respite from afflicting him. So even if one supposes that God were not the cause of the birth of man, the man's days are still short, especially in comparison to the eternity of God. Man expects even that brief time will be ended quickly when he has already passed a great part of his life. This is what he says now, "will not the short span of my days," because all the days of my life are few," finish quickly," when a great part of that short span is already past? It is not a great thing to stop persecuting me for the rest of my days, and so he concludes, "Leave me, then." If it seems difficult for you to not afflict me for at least one hour, it is certain that even after you cease to afflict me, there remains no cause for joy for me, but only cause for grief. He continues on this theme, "A little comfort in my pain," which I feel from the blows I am suffering. He says this because still he considered himself to be struck hard as long as his friends reproved him. He spoke about this when he said, "You set up witnesses against me." (v.17)

But one could object: On the contrary you should rather be afflicted here for a little time so that when you go from here, you will find consolation. This can be interpreted in two ways. In one way by returning a second time to this life. He excludes this saying, "Before I go away in," in death, "and I do not return to live," again. This can be explained in two ways. In one way it means that he is not to return to the same kind of life as some have falsely maintained. A better interpretation would be that he is speaking in the manner of a debater adopting the point of view of his adversaries before the truth is shown. (14:13 and 19:25) In a subsequent chapter, Job will clearly give evidence about the truth of the resurrection. In all the foregoing, therefore, he speaks about the resurrection supposing the opinion of those with whom he argues to be true, for they do not believe that there is another life except this one. They think men are either punished or rewarded for the evil or the good deeds which they do only in this life. In another way, he could expect consolation after the end of this life in the very state of death itself. But he rejects this saying, "to the land of gloom," where I will go after death.

After removing this cause, since this cannot seem good to God, since Job is the work of the hands of God and since his enemies who oppress him are shown to be evil, he next proceeds to the second way in which the innocent are sometimes afflicted in human judgment. Sometimes, when someone innocent is falsely accused before a judge, the judge acting according to justice subjects him to torture to discover the truth. The cause of this are three defects in human knowledge. One is because all human knowledge proceeds from sense, and because the senses belong to the body and are about corporeal objects, a judge cannot know the interior conscience of the accused. He excludes this from God when he says, "Are your eyes made of flesh?" as if to say: Do you know through the corporeal senses that you see only corporeal things and cannot know interior things? He uses the eyes because the sight exceeds all the other senses in man. The second defect is that man cannot even understand even all corporeal things through the bodily senses. For he cannot know what happens in things far away and concealed from him. He shows this is not the case with God when he says, "Or do you see like a man sees," in that you cannot know what happens everywhere, even things which are hidden? The third defect of human knowledge is the result of the nature of time, both because his knowledge increases from day to day and also because he forgets those things which he knows through a long period of time, so it is necessary for him to learn by repetition as it were. He then shows this is not the case with God saying, "Are your days like the days of a man?" in that your knowledge increases from day to day. "And are your years like man's time," in that some of your knowledge decreases in the course of time. He continues, "That you should interrogate me about my evildoing and examine my sin," to investigate through tribulations if I have sinned in my work or am evil in my thought, like men investigate criminal guilt using torture. So, after the investigation of this sort is completed and you find no sin in me, "Know that I have done nothing wicked," as though you could not know this otherwise than you do not search my sins using scourges. Do this freely and without contradiction, "since there is no one who can take me from your hand." For sometimes judges fail to discover the truth using torture while those who ought to be tortured are taken out of their hands.

Since he had already stated that he was the work of God's hands to show by this that it cannot seem good to God to oppress him for his own sake, as though he delighted in suffering, he clearly explains what he had merely stated as a given. "It was your hands that made me." To preclude someone from accepting the heresy of the Manichees that the soul of man was made by God but the body was formed by a creator contrary to God, he continues, "they fashioned me wholly, round about." He says, "round about" because the body seems to be round about the soul like a garment is to the one wearing it, or the house is to the dweller. He says, "wholly" to refer to each member of the body. He says, "fashioned" to allude to the fact that man is said to be formed from the slime of the earth. "The hands" may be interpreted as the divine operation, and so he uses the plural, "hands" because although there is one divine power operating, its operation is nevertheless multiplied in its effects, both because of the diversity of the effects and also because of the variety of mediate causes through the mediation of which he produces its effects. He says then, "and so will you cast me down unexpectedly?" because it seems sudden when someone who produces something corrupts it without clear cause. When someone creates something, he wills it to exist, indeed he made it to exist. Someone who destroys something wills it not to exist. So it seems that if someone destroys something which he made before, it seems to be a sudden change of will, unless some obvious new cause arises which makes it clear that what earlier had to be made, now should be corrupted. But no sudden change of will can happen in God, and so he asks almost in surprise, "and so will you cast me down unexpectedly?" He seems to say: It seems unfitting for you now to destroy without cause someone you earlier made. Or the words, "made me," can refer to the constitution of the substance and the words, "They fashioned me wholly round about," can refer to those things which modify the substance, whether they are the goods of the soul or of the body or of exterior chance.

The Third Lesson: Job Desires a Respite

18 Why did you take me from the womb? Would that I had perished so that no eye would see me. 19 I would have been as though I had not been, carried from womb to tomb. 20 Will not the short span of my days finish quickly? Leave me then for a little while to myself, so that I may lament my pain; 21 before I go away and I do not return to the land of gloom, covered with the mist of death; 12 a land of unhappiness, a land of shadows; where the shades of death and no order but everlasting terror dwells.

Job had finished his investigation with the statement that he has suffered a great many tribulations regardless of the fact that he is just or unjust. He wants to ask if this can be true lest anyone could believe that God rejoiced in his tribulations. It would seem unfitting that someone would cause an effect as his own to treat it evilly, because every agent rather intends the good in its effect. This supposes, however, that he is the work of God as he made clear in the foregoing arguments. (vv. 3 and 4) So he asks him, "Why did you take me from the womb," as if to say: Did you cause my birth in order to subdue me with trials? Because someone could object that absolutely considered (*simpliciter*) it is better to exist even in tribulations than not to have been born at all, he rejects this opinion saying, "would that I had perished," in my mother's womb," so that no eye would see me," so as not to suffer shame from the great evils which the eyes of men contemplate in me. If I had perished in my mother's womb, I would still have had the dignity of existing without the unhappiness which befell me in existing. He speaks about this saying, "I would have been," i.e. I would have participated in what is good in existing, "as though I had not been," I would have been free from the evils of this life as though I had never existed. For the dignity of man's being does not consist in being preserved perpetually. But rather, at length, as man dies and is carried to a tomb which is prepared for the dead so that his memory may remain after death in some way. I would have been without even this, and so the text continues, "carried from womb to tomb."

Because Eliphaz imputed the fact that he said he was innocent to pride, he then says, "Because of my pride, you will capture me like a lioness." For Eliphaz had already referred to Job saying, "The roaring of the lion and the voice of the lioness and the teeth of the lion's whelps have been broken." (4:10)

Therefore he says, "Because of my pride, you will capture me like a lioness," as if he should say: You make me to be reckoned by those who hear my words like a lioness because of pride.

The very fact that he was considered evil for that reason was for him a further punishment on top of the first one.

So he continues, "and returning you torment me wondrously," for you first came afflicting me taking away things and wounding my body and now you have returned again and torment me through my friends. This is cause for wonder because I ought rather to receive consolation from my friends. Or he says this because a man is most tormented when he is derided by his friends. He shows the type of torment this is continuing, "You set up witnesses against me."

For Eliphaz and his companions made a pretense of defending the justice of God and in this they wanted to stand like witnesses to speak on behalf of God and attack Job to convict him of sin. Therefore, "you multiply your anger," that is the effect of your anger when you punish me in so many different ways, "and your punishments battle against me," when they assault me with a certain authority and without contradiction. For soldiers who normally attack with royal authority and without contradiction anyone who is thought to be a criminal.

Since he had generally posited that he had been formed and created by God, he proceeds specifically to the manner of his creation comparing himself with someone who wants remind someone of something which he seems to have forgotten. He explains everything to him part by part so that even so it may be brought back to mind. For the God seems to forgot the benevolence which he had toward his creation when he exposes it to corruption. He acts like one who forgets and Psalm 12 expresses the same idea, "How long, O Lord, will you forget me forever." (v.1) Therefore he says, "Remember, I beseech you, that you have made me like clay." Consider that he recalls two productions of man. The first is the first institution of nature, which alludes to what Genesis says, "God formed man from the slime of the earth," (2:7) and so he says, "you made me like the clay." Here he also seems to refer to the composition of man from primary elements. Since it was also said to the first man, "You are dust and to dust you shall return," (Gen. 3:19) he says as a consequence, "and will you grind me to dust," which also befits the natural matter. For it follows that what is generated from earth according to nature is fittingly resolved back into the earth. From this someone might wonder, since it seems a greater work to form a man from the earth than to retain men already formed in being so that he does not revert to the earth, hence it is that God who formed man from the dust permits him to return to the dust. The question is whether this is only the result of the necessity of matter that man in this respect has not advantage over other things formed from the earth, or whether it is a result of divine providence punishing man for some fault.

Next he treats the making of man with reference to the work of propagation by which man is generated from man. Note here that he attributes every work of nature to God, not so as to exclude the operation of nature, but in the way things done through secondary causes are attributed to the principle agent. Similarly the operation of the saw is attributed to the carpenter. The fact that nature operates comes from God, who instituted it for that purpose. In the generation of man, first comes the release of the seed and to express this he says, "Did you not pour me out like milk?" For just as semen is the product of nourishment, so too is milk, Second, the physical mass is joined together in the womb of the woman and he expresses this saying, "and curdle me like cheese?" For the seed of the male is related to the matter which the female furnishes in the generation of man and other animals like the coagulant is related to the generation of cheese. Third, the distinction of the organs takes place. Their strength and consistency comes from the nerves and bones and they are encased externally by skin and flesh. So he says, "With skin and flesh you clothed me, with bones and sinews knit me together." Fourth comes the animation of the fetus, and this is especially true in the case of the rational soul, which is not infused until after organization of the matter. Certain seeds of virtue are divinely infused together with the rational soul into man, some common to all and others special to the individual. For this reason, some men are naturally disposed to one virtue; others to another. Job says further on, "Mercy grew in me from my infancy and came forth from the womb with me." (31:18) He therefore says here, "You gave me life and mercy." Last comes the conservation of life, as much in the womb of the mother as after leaving the womb. This conservation is partly due to natural principles and partly to gifts of God which are added over and above nature, whether they pertain to the soul, the body, or exterior goods. Expressing this theme he says, "and your visitation guarded my spirit." For according to the language of Scripture, as God is said to draw back from someone when he withdraws his gifts from him, so he is said to visit him when he bestows his gifts on him.

To preclude someone thinking because he had said to God, "Remember, I beseech you, that you made me like clay," that he was of the opinion that God could forget, he excuses himself concerning this language saying, "Although you hide these things in your heart, I know that you still remember everything." For God is said by analogy to hide something in his heart like a man when he does not show by effect what he has in thought or in affection. So therefore he says that God hides these things in his heart the thing cited before because he does not externally show in effect that he recognizes him as his own creation him whom he seems to cast down so suddenly.

The Second Lesson: Is Job Blameworthy?

14 If I have sinned and you have spared me for a moment, why did you not allow me to be cleansed from my iniquity? 15 If I will be unjust, woe is me! And if I am just, I will not lift up my head drowned in unhappiness and misery. 16 Because of my pride, you will capture me like a lioness and returning you torment me wondrously. 17 You set up witnesses against me, you redouble your anger, and punishments battle against me.

Job sought the cause of his punishment in what he said before based on the supposition that he was innocent. Now he proceeds to inquire whether he is punished because he is a sinner. To show first that he is not punished for sin, he uses the following argument: If he did commit sin, he must have sinned most in the time of his prosperity. But if sin is the only reason why some suffer adversities in the present life, given the presence of the cause, the effect must follow. Therefore, immediately after someone sins, adversity must follow. However, it is clear that Job preserved the same way of living in the times of his prosperity. If he sinned living in this way then, he had sinned for a long time before he suffered adversity. So since adversity did not immediately follow after sin, it would be necessary to say that God spared him for that time because he did not bring any adversity on him. To say that a sin which God had spared him again for punishment seems unfitting. Therefore it does not seem right that he be punished now for a sin which he committed before. He speaks to this theme when he says, "If I have sinned," in the time of my prosperity," and you have spared me for a moment," because you did not immediately cause adversity for me, "why did you not allow me to be cleansed from my iniquity?" This is as if he said: Why since you thought I was pure in pardoning my sin at some time do you punish me again as though I were not pure?

He also adds another argument as a consequence which is this: If sin is the whole cause for the present adversities, it would follow that the just would not suffer adversities in this world like sinners do. Now, we see that adversities are universally suffered by both the just and sinners. This is just what he says, "If I am unjust, woe is me!" because I suffer adversities; "and if I will be just," either I was that way earlier or only now became so, "I will not," on this account, "lift up my head," as if I have been raised up from misery. I speak as one existing "drowned in affliction" from sorrow, "and misery," from need and confusion. By drowning he refers to the abundance of his affliction and misery, and he seems to say this against the words of Eliphaz (5:18) and Bildad (8:5) who had said that if he were converted he would be freed from adversity. Against this he says that even if he were justified, he is still not free from misery on this account, although he has been sufficiently punished for his past sins, if there were any. He shows this using the term designating the fullness of misery and affliction.