

## **“I HATE MYSELF”**

### *Job*

Time and again we join the company of Job – we take off our rose colored glasses – we cut out all the “sweet talk” – we stop “pussyfooting around” and loud and clear – we voice our complaint. With Job, in his agony – his agony of body (with his “broken skin” and his flesh “clothed with worms”) with Job and his agony of mind (“nights of torture”, he says “without hope”) – we too begin to envision God as the sniper, on the bridge of heaven, taking practice shots at us also, so that with Job – we scream at the Divine Marksman, “Why has thou set me as thy mark?” – i.e. “Why make me your target?”

You get the picture? Here we are with Job, dancing before the arrows of the God we once thought good, trying to dodge the shots the Creator seems to be aiming directly at us, and wondering what on earth have we done to deserve, or even half explain, the sort of hell we must endure. Even the biggest sins should not warrant such “torture”. God, we reason with Job, must be very touchy, sensitive, so easily offended, to hit back so viciously at a poor mortal who is nothing, nothing but a “hireling” and “slave”, and woefully undeserving such royal wrath. Job’s and our picayune, pitiful little sins ought to be beneath the great God’s notice. So it is with bitter humor, sarcastic humor, that with Job, we pray, “If I sin, what do I do to thee, O thou watcher of men?”

You understand? Not if you’re too young and inexperienced, you don’t – and not if you’re too old and callused to the blasted hopes and burned and ripped flesh and lives around you, not if you don’t care – you will not understand Job.

But if you are sensitive to the pain of the world, then Job is your kind of saint. You join Job’s company and pray (Job 7: 13-16):

“When I say, my bed shall comfort me, my couch shall ease my complaint; then thou scarest me with dreams, and terrifiest me through visions: so that my soul

**chooseth strangling, and death rather than my life. I loathe it; I would not live always; let me alone; for my days are a breath.”**

**You see, Job is one of a long line of saints, a great company – including you and me – whose faith is raked over the coals of human hell, who has prayed, “O God, if thou art my friend, what wouldst thou do to me as mine enemy?” As St. Teresa, also one of Job’s company, used to say with her biting wit (and I have quoted her often), “It is no wonder, Lord God, you have so few friends; you treat the few you have so badly.”**

**So Job says to God, his erstwhile friend, “Let me alone” – i.e., “Go away!” “Go away, God! Be gone!”**

**Don’t you see? This wishing God dead is nothing new. When one of Job’s company begins to think with his skin, under pain, when his tortured body (not just his mind, but the very marrow of him begins to reason), when it comes out with Job, “Is not man’s lot a war service upon earth? – As a slave – months of emptiness – nights of torture – without hope – life is wind – mine eye shall see no more good” – then is it not human, “in the anguish of my spirit”, “in the bitterness of my soul”, to see God as far, far gone, or to hate God, to will him out of reach, out of life, out of existence, to turn on God when the truth is, it is I myself who have become a burden to myself, it is I myself who would rather strangle, rather die, than live, than live in a world like this? Is it not I who rebel against me? Is it not I who say, “I loathe myself”? –**

**So maybe the scribes were right who tampered with the text of Job. Eighteen times they changed the text, thinking it offensive to God. So here they changed Job’s complaint against God, “Why have I become a burden to thee?” “Why do you loathe me?” to the confession, the pitiful confession of the man himself, “Why have I become a burden to me?” “Why do I despise myself?”**

**And, for once, the scribes were probably right. They were reading into the text their own human plight. “Why have I become a burden to me?” Why do I despise myself? And project all this self-disgust on God? Why blame Deity? Why kill him off, wish him dead, because you wish you, yourself were dead?**

**In one of the most appealing, touching, pathetic lines in all the Old Testament, Job, who doesn't really want to unbelieve in God, who, in spite of the hell of life, wants to have faith, sees himself, grown man as he is, as a little boy, running away from hope, from home, out into the night to punish his father, who'll miss him, and be sorry he spanked him, and will rush to find him, but in frantic search, cannot, for he is gone, forever, for he is dead – so Job says to God, “Thou shalt search for me in the dark, but I shall not be.”**

**“Too late, God, too late. In my youth, I was filled with noble dreams. I was going to be your servant. But, it's too late now, it's ashes, and I'm running away to die” ---**

**And yet, Job doesn't want to hate either God or himself. He's caught like St. Paul – between wanting to die, and wanting to live. Life is profoundly disordered. Yes, but, says Job, at its longest it is “swifter than a weaver's shuttle”, so we cling to it, what there is of it, tenaciously, just because it is ephemeral. We are like Raskolnikov in Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment. Here the condemned man clings to life. Here the criminal, about to be executed, knows that having been given once, and only once, to live, would rather live, standing up, on one square yard of rocky cliff, above the endless sea, beneath the eternal storm, would rather live like this, clinging to the cliffside, than die, would still choose life over death: “It were better to live so”, says Raskolnikov, “than to die at once! Only to live! To live and live! Life, whatever it may be! – How true it is! Lord God, how true!”**

**Let us pray:**

**O Christ on thy cross, thou “dark side” of God, we thy sometimes servants, know that we too must die. We sought not to be born, nor would we lie to thee and say the**

state to which that birth brought us we always love. But we would not hate our life or thee. Thou wouldst that we love thee. And we would if we could. And we can, thou loving us, thou our last, our best, our eternal Friend. Do not "let us alone", though we ask it. Do not "let us alone", though we plead for it. Pursue us through time to eternity. We need thee. Thou art our life. Amen