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# The Franciscan Legionnaire

Newsletter of the Friars Legion of St. Peter's Church in the Loop  
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## MAN OF SORROWS

Sorrows, we all have them. Complaints about our sorrows, we all make them. And that makes all of us perfectly prepared readers of the Book of Job, the Bible's longest meditation on the subject of human suffering and its longest complaint to Almighty God about the way things are. The book's very length is intimidating, and it makes us suspicious, for we tend to think that true wisdom should be able to be expressed in a few words. A proverb that told us all we needed to know about suffering, that we would value and would carry with us as a constant companion, but a biblical book of forty-two chapters is a very different thing, a thing we are not likely to want to spend much time with.

Job, however, is a book that repays whatever time is devoted to it. The sheer beauty of the language is worth the hours we give it. Most of the book is poetry, and poetry is notorious for not holding up well on the journey from one language to another. Yet the poetry of Job is quite beautiful in English, if we are bold enough to step out of the usually used American Catholic translation and dive into either the Revised Standard Version or the King James Version.

And for the reading of this book, it is a good idea to be that bold and to go with the best translations available in English, for the beauty of expression is not just window dressing, a bit of literary parsley that we could do as well without as with. For beauty and wonder are at the heart of the answer that is finally given to Job. To feel the power of the answer, we must see the beauty of the universe, and to do that, it helps a great deal to hear this in words as lovely as those chosen by the original author.

Job begins with a two-chapter introduction that sets the stage for the entire book. "Sets the stage" is a turn of phrase that fits the opening of this book especially well, as the book's dramatic quality has long been noticed. It does not read like a play and attempts to turn it into a theater piece have always required extensive rewriting, but there is a sweeping motion to the action and a depth of characterization that one also finds in the work of the best playwrights.

The opening scene is in the earth below and in the heaven above. Job is introduced as a man of the land of Uz, and not just any man, but a great man. He has great wealth and he has a wonderful family. Most importantly, he has integrity and righteousness. He is conscientious in his own following of God's commands, and he offers prayers and sacrifices for his children, in case they have committed any hidden sins.

In heaven the Lord sits enthroned, and he has noted Job's justice. When Satan (the name is the Hebrew word for *accuser*) enters God calls attention to Job, as if he were taunting the Accuser, baiting him with a man against whom he cannot make any accusation. Well, harrumphs Satan, if Job is blameless it is because you, O God, have made life so easy for him; take away his prosperity, and he will curse you to your face. Very well, God says, all that he has is now in your power, only do not touch his person.

In the course of a day, a most horrible day, Job loses all his possessions and suffers the death of all his children. Job tears his garments in sorrow and falls to the ground, stunned, but he does not curse God. He worships him, saying, "Naked I came forth from my mother's

womb, and naked shall I return; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.”

The scene shifts to heaven, and again the Lord confronts Satan, taunting him with Job’s goodness, a goodness he has maintained even in the teeth of such terrible loss, contrary to what Satan had confidently predicted. “Skin for skin!” the Accuser retorts in ill humor, “But put forth your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face.” The Lord now allows that Satan can harm Job’s person, but he must respect his life.

Satan hurries back down to earth and strikes Job with an unnamed illness, a terrible one that causes deep sores to break out all over his body. Stinking and miserable, Job leaves the house, sits on an ash heap and scrapes his sore skin with a piece of a broken pot. His wife urges him to give it up, to curse God and die, but Job refuses. In all this, the narrator tells us, Job did not sin with his lips.

This is the kind of calamity that attracts attention even when it strikes a humble, unknown man, and Job has been identified as one of the most prominent men of his age. So word of his suffering travels fast, and three of his closest friends – Eliphaz of Teman, Bildad of Shuh, and Zophar of Naamath – gather together to make the journey to their stricken friend to offer him what support they can. When they see him, they are shocked; they can hardly recognize him. They weep with him and then sink into silence, for there are no words that can give comfort to one in such pain. Seven days and seven nights they sit with him quietly. And finally, Job opens his mouth to speak.

From here, the beginning of chapter 3, almost to the end of the book, it is all speaking. Job speaks. The three friends speak. Elihu speaks. And the Lord speaks. Although it is not always obvious that they are all speaking to each other,

by the end of the book every speaker seems to have had his say, and every speaker has been answered.

Job is the first to speak, and in chapter 3 he gives voice to the lament of all who suffer. He curses the day of his birth, and wishes that his birthday had been his death day. Why has he been given the “gift” of life when to him it is no gift at all but only bitter torture? Question piles on top of question, most of them beginning with *Why?* Why did I not die at birth? Why is light given to him who is in misery, and life to the bitter in soul? Why is light given to the one whom God has hedged in? Why does he live who longs for death? These are not questions that have answers, or at least Job clearly believes that there are no adequate answers for them.

Therefore, when Eliphaz starts speaking in chapter 4, he does so with great hesitation, knowing that his words may not be appreciated by Job. “If one ventures a word with you,” Eliphaz begins delicately, “will you be offended? Yet who can keep from speaking?” For Eliphaz actually thinks he has the answer to the rhetorical questions of Job’s opening lament. It is not the innocent who suffer, Eliphaz

insists, but the guilty. We know that even the angels are not faultless in the eyes of God, so how much more guilty in his sight is mortal man? “Can a man be pure before his maker?” Of course not, Eliphaz continues, but God is merciful to the repentant. The most reasonable and just thing for Job to do is confess his sins, mend his ways, and ask God’s forgiveness. Surely it will be given to him, and when it is given Job will see that his fortunes will be restored by God.

Job’s response to his friend’s suggestion is brutal and shows that Eliphaz, if anything, has underestimated Job’s touchiness. Job lashes out at Eliphaz for totally missing the point, for offering a reproof to one who does not need it. In chapters 6 and 7, Job insists that he does not



need to hear a call to repentance and that his sufferings have quite overwhelmed him. He suggests, but does not quite say it yet, that God has not dealt justly with him.

This exchange sets the pattern for the next twenty chapters and more. Job's friends will take turns speaking, and Job will answer every speech that they make. They will insist that God is just, that only the guilty are punished, that Job must have sinned, and that the only remedy he has is to admit his guilt, repent, and implore God's mercy. Job will insist on his own innocence, and thus – there is no way to avoid it – on the injustice with which God is treating him. It is a heated exchange, one that grows more heated with each chapter. In arguing with his friends, Job must give expression to the depth of his pain, and by this pouring of his experience into words he becomes even more convinced of the injustice of God, so much so that he demands a hearing before God, an opportunity to bring his complaint before the Almighty. In effect, Job cries out to God to defend him against God. God will be his Redeemer; God will save him from the injustice that God has committed against him. To the three friends, this is nothing short of blasphemy, and in their defense of the justice of God, they eventually lose all sympathy for the suffering Job.

The speeches roll on and on, but the author never lets his readers get bored. Along the path of the personal witness of Job and the theological wrangling of all four of them, there are some magnificent pieces such as Job's elegy on the frailty of man in chapter 14, his lashing out in chapter 24 against the violence and oppression that are all around us, and the haunting, profound meditation on the quest for wisdom in chapter 28.

Job's last speech is followed by a six-chapter intervention by the young Elihu, who barges in unannounced and unexpected. He does not add much that is new, but he does argue, as the three friends had not, that yes, human suffering might be punishment from God, but it might also be a warning from God, so that a person tending toward sin but not yet a sinner might amend his ways and so avoid disaster. It is a subtle point.

In chapters 38 through 41, Job gets his wish and has his hearing before God. It is, however, an encounter in which Job must do most of the hearing. The speeches of the Lord to Job out of the whirlwind are the dramatic and poetic climax of the book. God plies Job with questions, most of which direct Job's attention to the wonder and mystery and beauty of creation. God has made all of this. Does Job create it, control it, or even understand it? It might seem that God is a bit off the point, since the topic under discussion is justice and the sufferings of the innocent, and not the power of God or the majesty of his creation. And yet the Lord's answer is right on target, the only answer that can really speak to Job in his plight. For the mystery of God's justice cannot be wrestled to the ground by any created human intellect. The only appropriate way to regard that divine justice is with the same awe and wonder that is a part of our regard for the beauty of the universe. And just now, Job is incapable of having that regard. His sufferings have so completely absorbed him and overwhelmed him that they have become his universe. Everything else is crowded out, marginalized, eliminated. The words of the Lord at the end of the book push right through the boundaries of Job's too shrunken world. They crack open his world of pain and his vision so that he can see more clearly and more broadly. Job's innocent sufferings have made him see the total inadequacy of the human categories of justice as a yardstick for God, and now God's words expand that vision, making him see past the truth that he has grasped to the edge of the utter mystery of God.

In the end, God's wrath is turned on Job's friends and Job, his fortunes restored, must now become their priest, offering sacrifices to God on their behalf. Their sin is that they did not speak truly about God, as Job did. So eager were they to defend God, they insisted over and over that God's justice is transparent to human eyes, and so they unwittingly reduced him to our level. Job at least, in his pain, never did that. He always knew that something here did not make sense. It still doesn't, but we have learned with Job how much and little that really matters.

—*Fr. Bob Sprott, O.F.M.*



### MEMORIAL VOTIVE LIGHTS

The action of prayer is often accompanied by the gesture of lighting a candle. The candle becomes an offering to the Lord, a sign of the offering of ourselves that we make to God whenever we come before him with a special intention or petition. After a while, we must leave the church to be about other business, but the candle stays, burning constantly in the church even as our prayer remains in the presence of the Lord.

Your gift to Saint Peter's for the year-long memorial votive light helps to support all of our ministry and works. And on our part, you and your intentions are remembered daily in our prayers for our helpers and benefactors.

#### APPLICATION FOR YEAR-LONG MEMORIAL CANDLE

*(Please print, leaving a space between each word.)*

To be lit in honor of: \_\_\_\_\_  
Living \_\_\_\_\_ Deceased \_\_\_\_\_

Requested by: \_\_\_\_\_

Date candle is to be lit: Immediately \_\_\_\_\_ Specific Date \_\_\_\_\_

The offering for the Memorial Candle is \$150.00. Please enclose a check for the full amount with this form.



#### MEMBERSHIP IN THE FRIARS LEGION *brings with it...*

- A sharing in all of the more than 40 masses offered at Saint Peter's each week
- A sharing in the daily Lauds and Vespers prayed by the Franciscans of Saint Peter's Friary
- A sharing in the Eucharistic Novena of nine Tuesdays before the Feast of Saint Anthony of Padua on June 13
- A special Eucharist offered for the living members on the Feast of Saint Anthony on June 13 and on the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul on June 29
- A special Eucharist offered for the deceased members on All Souls Day on November 2 and on the Commemoration of All the Deceased of the Franciscan Order on November 5
- A sharing in all the ministry and good works done by the Franciscan Friars at Saint Peter's, whom you support by your generosity



#### APPLICATION FOR PERPETUAL ENROLLMENT IN THE FRIARS LEGION

*(Please print, leaving a space between each word.)*

Please Enroll: \_\_\_\_\_  
as a Perpetual Member of the Saint Peter's Friars Legion.  
Living \_\_\_\_\_ Deceased \_\_\_\_\_

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

OFFERING: Individual, \$25.00 \_\_\_\_\_ Family, \$100.00 \_\_\_\_\_ *(Immediate family, parents and children)*