

Homily for October 17, 2010, the 29<sup>th</sup> Sunday (C). St. Ignatius Church

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There was a surprising news item recently about something you do everyday – make the sign of the cross. Why was it newsworthy? Because the head of the Soviet Union, Vladimir Putin, and the head of Poland both knelt and made the sign of the cross at a memorial service. What's in a sign? Or, as we say, a sacramental? A lot, as the Orthodox faith slowly returns to Russia, and we move to reunion with this historic part of Christianity. So, is religion on the rise? Yes and no. Mostly no. There is a raging and assertive atheism the past few years, with scholars who are ignorant of even basic theology writing, books that disprove, so they think, the whole case for God, faith, church. If they heard the gospel today about Jesus healing a leper, they would point out, first, they don't believe it; second, lepers are healed and the disease now is conquered by the science of medicine. All praise to the healing art, which can even postpone dying. It cannot cure death – no one can, except the God of life.

When Jesus promises a more abundant life, he meant right now, and later, in what we call heaven. We know that, we are believers. I am going to address the question that really challenges faith in God. In theology it is called theodicy. It is concerned not with the evil that comes from sin but the suffering of the innocent. How or why does an all powerful and all loving God allow it – the earthquake in Haiti that swallows up a quarter million people, or diseases like cancer that do not come from the wrong lifestyle? Why does the earth fail, why do our bodies fail, why is there death out of due time – or death at all?

We no longer blame all on this some original sin, the story – not the history – of Adam and Eve. But death and accident stalk our lives everyday. There are many partial answers. One is from St Paul, that good comes out of evil. In truth, it does. It brings us to show compassion, the most godlike virtue, the one Jesus enjoined upon us – remember the Good Samaritan. But why is there evil that we do not cause? We can't blame it on the devil. Devil is the symbol of the evil that comes from sin.

Eternal life, life with God is one answer, and you heard those wondrous words from Paul today: if we die with him, we shall live with him, if we persevere, hold out to the end, we shall reign with him. Perhaps that should be enough. We were created once, we shall be created again. Who said so? Jesus. Go read all about it in John's gospel.

Evil is a mystery. So is God. And the mystery of God who is love is greater. You see that everyday, with countless acts of love, compassion, faithfulness to duty, and sacrificial love especial in families. So much goodness – Gandhi called it soul-force. And it is greater than the evil we experience or read about everyday. It makes life possible.

Let me say more about this built-in failure to creation. God is infinite, boundless, contains all things. There cannot be two infinite beings. Since God could not make a perfect world of bodies, and knowing that we will suffer from its imperfections, the Creator moves into his own creation. In other words, becomes one of us. Yes, the Incarnation. Jesus. And then dies like us. Yes, in Jesus. And then confronts the last and greatest evil, which is death. You know the glorious answer, God conquers this last evil by raising Jesus and promising our own.

This is hardly original with me. It develops the insight of the great mystic, Angelus Silesius who rightly attributes this to the divine love. He said, love a magnet is, it pulls us into God. But what is greater yet, it pulls God into death. Yes, into Jesus' death and our own, so that love will be triumphant.

So how do we live? With faith, hope, and love. And the greatest of these is love.