

**Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year B
(June 25, 2006)**

How to Weather the Storm

Is the name Elie Wiesel familiar to you? Elie Wiesel is a Jewish philosopher, writer, and lecturer, but most importantly he is a Holocaust survivor whose experience in the concentration camps as a child has left a lasting and indelible impression on him. He tells a story of an encounter with a friend years later, also a Jew and a survivor of the death camps, who said to him, “In the face of all that our people have suffered and remembering the horrors of the camps as we saw our relatives and friends taken to the gas chambers how can you still believe in God?” Wiesel tells us that he replied, “In the face of all that our people have suffered and remembering the horrors of the camps as we saw our relatives and friends taken to the gas chambers how can we not believe in God?”

Victor Frankl, a Jewish psychiatrist, also a Holocaust survivor, wrote a book called *Man’s Search for Meaning*. It was an attempt to answer the same question that Elie Wiesel’s friend had put to him. What meaning can anyone find not only in the horrors of the death camps but in the catastrophes of nature as well, when God seems to have lost control and the world is overwhelmed with chaos and destruction? It’s a question that many in our own time have asked, especially the victims of tsunamis, hurricanes, earthquakes, tornadoes, and volcanic eruptions.

For many people facing these facts of the inhumanity of human beings towards other human beings and facing these powerful cataclysms of nature the question arises: Where can we find hope? What happens to faith?

Our readings today try to tackle both of these questions. Whether they do it satisfactorily or not depends on how each of us listens to the word of God and how we respond.

The first reading is from the thirty-eighth chapter of the Book of Job. Through 37 chapters Job has been complaining about how God is treating him, and his so-called friends have been trying to convince him that he has done something wrong to incur the punishments he has experienced. Job knows that no such thing is true and he complains, he complains bitterly

and vehemently. People talk about the patience of Job. I don't know where that idea came from. Job is not patient. He keeps asking over and over again, "Why, why, why?" No, Job is not patient. But he does have faith. Through all of it he does not lose his faith in God. So in chapter 38 God answers him. But it is not the kind of answer that Job expected or that we might expect in similar circumstances. God does not explain why this has happened nor does God make any excuses. Instead in one of the most beautiful and poetic passages of the Hebrew Scripture God recalls the wonders of creation. It's a passage that makes for marvelous prayer and contemplation, and I recommend that you get out your Bibles at home and read it – not just read it, but pray and ponder it.

And what then is Job's response to God? A deeper faith. He says, "I have dealt with things that I do not understand, things too wonderful for me which I cannot know. I had heard of you by word of mouth but now my eye has seen you. Therefore I disown what I have said, and repent in dust and ashes."

The victims of tsunamis and hurricanes could easily identify with those terrified disciples that Mark tells us about in the Gospel. I would not be surprised if Mark had our first reading in mind when he wrote this passage because there it tells us that God controls the waters and the waves, and Mark shows us Jesus doing the same. He then asks the disciples what they might have thought was a stupid question: Why were you terrified? Do you not yet have faith?

So in a sense the answer to the question, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" is perhaps that there is no answer, at least none that we can understand. And so God requires Job – and Jesus requires the disciples – to have greater faith. Maybe in times of trouble we can think of Jesus always present to us, although he might seem to be sleeping, but then awakening and saying to us as he said to the disciples, "Do you not yet have faith?" Elie Wiesel is not a Christian, but he seems to have caught this message.

Water, you know, is an ambiguous symbol. It can bring destruction as in tsunamis and hurricanes. But it can also bring life. Indeed it is necessary for life. Today here in our church we will celebrate the life-giving power of water as we baptize four of our newest parishioners. The life that the water gives will of course be spiritual and we will not see it, but it is real

nonetheless. And it is powerful enough to plant within these children the seeds of a faith that can one day respond, “Yes, Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief.”