

Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, year B

It is good to hear today that “death was not God’s doing”. There are some deaths that strike us as uniquely and completely *wrong*: a young mother or father, a little harmless child dies, and we search in vain for any sense of justice, for rightness. It always strikes us as wrong when people are a little too ready to say, *Well, it’s God’s will*: even if every nerve in our body is jangled by what’s happened, even if we can detect nothing but mindless cruelty. Do we want to believe in and trust a God who intends, who wills, such deaths? It’s a real question.

In such a frame of mind it should immediately come to our attention that the central image of our faith is that of a young man dying a peculiarly horrible and punishing death, despite the fact that we happen to know he has done nothing wrong.

It should, further, strike us that the God we are beginning to doubt, for his heartless infliction of senseless death, actually *is* the broken figure on the Cross.

In today’s Gospel we read of a little child *twelve years old* who dies, and we read of an old woman who has suffered incurably *for twelve years*. This tells us that any suffering is just as real and just as unmindful of people’s moral deserving. All suffering raises the hard questions of whether God is truly good, or truly almighty: whether he *could* prevent evil, but chooses not to, or would like to prevent evil, but *cannot*. The key to the riddle is in the figure on the Cross: when God enters his world as a creature, he is at the heart of suffering. Mine and yours as well. Not as a distant spectator, but as the ultimate victim.

I’m not sure what the old woman thought about Jesus, or what brought Jairus to this strange healer to beg for help. They both certainly thought that he *could* help them, *where no-one else could*. I believe there was something in Jesus that sensitive people could read in advance: his hidden plan of sacrifice was somehow communicated to them.

That is why the despairing lepers and the crucified criminal were able to make such extraordinary acts of faith in him: it is why John the Baptist knew he was “the Lamb of God who takes onto himself all the sins of the world”.

The story today tells us that **no matter what form it takes, our incurable suffering is our gateway to faith in Christ who was crucified.**

Finding him is so eternally important to us, and so eternally effective, that we might even say it made everything - yes, really *everything* - worth while.