

FAITH MATTERS

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WHY DO BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE?

BY FATHER JOE KRUPP



DEAR FATHER JOE,

SO MANY GOOD PEOPLE I KNOW HAVE SUFFERED HORRIBLY IN THE LAST MONTH AND I'M REALLY STRUGGLING TO HOLD ON TO MY FAITH. WHY DO GOOD PEOPLE SUFFER? HOW DO I KEEP MY FAITH IN THESE TIMES?

I'm sorry that things are so hard for you and your loved ones right now. As a priest, it's not uncommon for me to experience first-hand the great suffering that many people, good and bad, go through. Struggling with our faith at times like these is not something we should shy away from.

I think too often we look at the sorrow and pain that we and others experience and we try to theologize about it. We get a bit defensive or angry with God and try to defuse our defensiveness or anger with ideas we think might help us cope. We attempt consolation with clichés: "God will never give me what I can't handle", "That which doesn't kill me makes me stronger."

In my experience, all of these attempts at consolation fail for a simple reason: they don't address the core of the issue, which is, "I hurt and I don't like hurting. If God loves us and is all powerful, why does he let us hurt?"

Dr. Peter Kreeft put it best in his article, "God's Answer to Suffering." In it, he points out that our problem is answered, "not so much

by explanations as reassurances and that is what we get: the reassurance of the Father in the person of Jesus."

Think of it this way: Is there really any answer that could be provided that would make us look at the horrors and pains of life and say "Oh! OK! That makes it all better!"?

It seems that we hope there is some answer that will make the hurt stop. I invite you now to purge that concept from your hearts and minds. Even if, for a moment, the heavens were opened and we got a "because" to our "why," would it mitigate the pain? Does knowing how you broke your leg make the leg stop hurting?

Your hurt, my hurt, their hurt — none of it is soothed by an explanation of why we were hurt, but what will help is knowing how we can carry that hurt.

God's answer to our pain is, in the words of Kreeft, not a philosophy, but a person and that person is Jesus. His answer to our pain is his presence.

As humans, we tend to avoid other



people's pain. When I talk to families who've lost a loved one, they often tell me of feelings of abandonment by friends who wonder when they'll "get over it." People who were extremely supportive during the funeral and for a couple weeks afterward begin to slowly fade away and even avoid them. In his book, *A Grief Observed*, C.S. Lewis wrote about this experience after his wife died:

"An odd by-product of my loss is that I'm aware of being an embarrassment to everyone I meet. At work, at the club, in the street, I see people, as they approach me, trying to make up their minds whether they'll 'say something about it' or not. I hate it if they do, and if they don't. Some funk it altogether ... I like best the well brought-up young men, almost boys, who walk up to me as if I were a dentist, turn very red, get it over, and then edge away to the bar as quickly as they decently can. Perhaps the bereaved ought to be isolated in special settlements like lepers."

That is the human response to pain: we avoid it. We avoid our pain, we avoid others' pain. But this is not the divine response, not at all.

The response of God to the inevitable pain of we humans living in a

fallen world was and is to immerse himself into it.

We are in the Christmas season right now, the season when we celebrate that act of unspeakable love: God took on the human experience. In his birth and in his person, Jesus joined together the human and divine and forever changed what it means to be human. There is no longer any human experience outside of sin that is not a divine experience as well, and this includes our tears. To continue to quote Kreeft, at Jesus' birth, "human tears became divine tears." Beyond the overt beauty of God himself joining in our

sorrow, we recognize that he also offers to sanctify it – making our suffering not just about the pain of living in a fallen world, but about helping him save it.

When we recognize God's presence with us in our sorrow, we can also say to God "I join my suffering to yours" and in that simple surrender, we join Jesus in his suffering and help him save the world.

Dear reader, we hurt and, so often, we hurt because we love. There is no love without suffering, and there is no suffering without love. The question for us is, will we take both realities? Our God did.

YOU
ARE
NOT
ALONE

He loves us, he hurts with us. His invitation to us in our pain is “If you love me, hurt with me.”

This is remarkable love.

This is relentless love that hell itself cannot stop.

In the end, the battle cry of our God and his answer to our pain is not an explanation – it is an entrance. He lovingly, powerfully and gently enters into our wounds with us. He cries out, “You are not alone!” He takes our suffering

and draws it into himself so that our tears and wounds are not just consequences of living in a broken and fallen world, but a divine experience.

Whatever pain, whatever sorrow, whatever loss we experience will be redeemed in heaven. There, when we see love face to face, all that has been separated or lost will be joined and reunited.

Weep and let God weep with you.

You are not alone.

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