

My Brothers and Sisters,

When non-believers are asked why they do not believe in God, they often point to the sufferings of innocent people, especially children, and the incredible evils in the world. Today we could probably include the sex abuse crisis in the list. All of them are understandable! Why would a good and merciful God allow innocent people, especially small children, to suffer? Why would a good and merciful God permit so much evil, including sex abuse by those who claim to represent God, to exist in the world? All of us are constantly striving to make sense of our world, and these make no sense. Suffering and evil seem to contradict the idea of good and merciful God. When people are struggling, sophisticated theological answers do not seem to help.

Today's reading from the Book of Wisdom answers with a question: *"Who can know God's counsel, or who can conceive what the Lord intends?"* The author of Wisdom suggests that our inability to know God's counsel or conceive his intentions comes from our human limitations. In the final analysis, we have to recognize that God's ways are mysterious to us.

Several passages in the Old Testament reinforce this conclusion. When God sent Samuel to anoint David as king, God said to Samuel, *"Not as man sees does God see, because man sees the appearance but the LORD looks into the heart"* [1 Samuel 16:7b]. Later, through the prophet Isaiah, God said, *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways above your ways and my thoughts above your thoughts"* [55:8-9].

All of us are familiar with the story of Job. God had blessed Job superabundantly. When God pointed out to Satan how much Job praised and pleased God, Satan responded that Job had every reason to praise and thank God. Satan then asked to tempt Job. God permitted him to test Job, but he could not kill him. Consequently, over a period of time, Job lost everything but his life, and he still praised and thanked God. Job's friends, however, insisted that he must have done something to displease God to be so cursed, something which Job denied. He then asked for a face-to-face with God. In the final analysis, God's answer was, "Do you know all that I know? Can you do all that I can do?" In other words, God's ways are mysterious to us.

Living in the climate we live in today, many people, including many Catholic and non-Catholic Christians, are angry at God because of everything going on in the world. Today we have a hard time with mystery. As today's reading from Wisdom suggests, because of our human limitations, we cannot know the mind of God. Finally, if truth be told, many of us want and expect our God to act in the ways we think he should act. In Genesis, we are told that God created us in his image and likeness. We often want to re-create God in our image and likeness.

Today's Gospel once again reminds us that God's ways are not our ways. Using hyperbole, Jesus tells us that we have to hate our family to be his disciples. In other words, he wants to be radically first in our lives. Second, we have to take up our cross and follow him. Finally, again using hyperbole, we have to renounce all our possessions, again telling us he wants to be radically first in our lives.

My brothers and sisters, I would just like to make a brief comment about Paul's Letter to Philemon. In his letter to Philemon, he talks about becoming a spiritual father to Philemon's slave Onesimus. When I recently talked about evangelization, I mentioned that we are not only called to share the good news of Jesus with others but also to mentor others to also share the good news of Jesus. I think this is the meaning of spiritual fatherhood or motherhood today.