

Our readings this weekend are overflowing with the message of God's merciful love toward us and how He chooses to reach out to us to save us and draw us to himself that we may not be condemned but be saved. Again, it is because of His great love for us that God does all of this. But in the midst of just the everyday troubles of life, let alone pandemic, we may find ourselves asking, "Really? If that's the case, why don't I see it?" It's a fair question that deserves a fair answer.

Any person might mean two different things by asking this. If they are asking why is there suffering and evil in the world, my best answer is, well, there just is and always has been. Even Jesus suffered. And looking at Jesus as a model, suffering can be redemptive if it is willingly accepted and offered to God as such. That's a topic many have written about and which is more appropriate for say, a Good Friday homily. Redemption in Christ is the only thing that can allow suffering to rise above pointless agony.

The second meaning is the one I want to deal with today and it's something that any of us can use on a daily basis. This asks the more refined question, why don't I experience God working in my life? I believe you have, you just didn't know to call it that at the time. Before I get too deeply into this, I want to credit my source who is St. Ignatius of Loyola who teaches about this in his rules for discerning of spirits. I'm going to talk about the first two in a thumbnail sketch sort of way, but hopefully it will do you all some good.

Just as God worked to bring Israel out of its captivity in Babylon even though the people could not perceive it at the time, God works to bring even the sinner out of his or her sin even before he or she makes any overt commitment to God. God does this by nagging at ones conscience, giving the person a sense of disquiet and upset as they rightly judge their own sinful actions. Inner peace cannot be found. All this is God drawing the person away from sin and back toward Himself. God can be quite the nag and the pest, gnawing at the person relentlessly until they make the choice to turn from sin and back toward God or totally tune God out, but hopefully not that.

Once a person makes the basic choice for God, that's only the beginning. It is then, St. Ignatius tells us, that God gives the person. "courage and strength, consolations, tears, inspirations, and quiet, easing and taking away all obstacles, so that the person may go forward in doing good." (Gallagher, Timothy M. . The Discernment of Spirits) As I talked about the coming to God of the sinner, you may have thought, yes, I remember that happening to me. As we turn to how God keeps us on track toward himself, I expect you will be able to provide specific instances where these also happened to you.

How many of us waffled about coming back to Mass after the covid lockdown? Did someone speak to you or some thought or feeling occur to you that bolstered your courage and gave you the drive you needed to get out the door and get back to Mass? That was God giving courage. How about a time when you set yourself a project of praying more, it worked well for a while, then things got turbulent, self doubt may have gotten in the way, it just became a chore to even do those few minutes of prayer or Bible reading. Then a thought or feeling came to you, you heard the right word of inspiration, and you found the energy to stay with the practice and push through to better times. That was God sending strength.

Consolations are any uplifting thought, feeling, perception or happening. Those that lead us toward God are Spiritual Consolations and those that just make us feel good are, you guessed it, non-spiritual. Spiritual Consolations are God saying, I'm here and I love you. And non-spiritual consolations may lead to spiritual consolations if they eventually turn our hearts and minds to our God and Lord.

Any time we are moved to tears over the realization of God's great love for us, or a realization about God or his action in our life that overwhelms us with wonder and awe for our God, or when we are saddened by the suffering of Christ, his church or the people whom Jesus loves enough to call his own self, these tears too are God moving in our lives. If one experiences tears at profound religious experience often, it can be referred to as the gift of tears.

Inspirations are also of God, but this seems more obvious and hardly needs more mention than to point out any time you suddenly knew what you needed to do, or suddenly understood the meaning that had eluded you for some time, or clarity of understanding suddenly dawned on you, when that light suddenly came on, it was God throwing the switch.

God also seeks to strengthen our inner quiet, our inner piece because that's where we communicate most clearly with him. As Psalm 46 says, "Be still and know that I am God." And out of the quiet inner place, the person can go forth doing good. Anxiety is not of God. Turmoil is not of God. Disquieting thoughts of what if this and what if that are of the enemy and need to be dismissed as such. These things sap our energy and leave us in a dither where nothing is accomplished.

Lastly, God moves in us to ease and remove all obstacles so that we can move toward Him and do good. And the enemy, the evil one, is about laying down obstacles, "you've never done that before." "Who are you trying to fool, you're not religious by any stretch of the imagination." "You, in all your sins presume to turn to God!" All the thoughts, reasons, feelings or whatever's that crop up and would keep us from moving closer to God or continuing in spiritual practices are the work of the enemy. They need to be recognized as such, understood for what they are, and firmly rejected.

Every thought, feeling, reason, or happening that comes along that encourages, strengthens, enlightens, recognizes and celebrates, or opens the way for our movement toward God, is from God and should be embraced as such. Embrace what is from God, reject what is from the enemy and continue to make this your time of fulfillment in the love of God who has sent us redemption in His Son Jesus Christ.