

from afar, they did not recognize him,” for his face was changed by sores, his clothing and his refinement gone because of the loss of his possessions. The term “from afar” should be understood to mean that measure by which a man can be recognized from a distance. This change in their friend stirred them to sadness and compassion which they showed by external signs, for there follows, “and raising their voices,” out of the great depth of their sorrow, “they wept, and they rent their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads,” as a sign of humility and dejection, as though they felt themselves to be cast down by the casting down of their friend. The text adds, “heavenward” as though they might provoke the mercy of heaven by this humiliation. Consider that the compassion of friends is a consolation, either because adversity like a burden is more lightly born when it is carried by many, or even more because all sorrow is alleviated when mixed with pleasure. To have the experience of someone’s friendship is very pleasurable, which especially derives from their compassion in adversity and so offers consolation.

They consoled him not only by showing compassion to him, but also by showing their fellowship with him; for there follows, “they sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights.” Nevertheless one must not understand this to mean a continuous period, but at suitable times, for great sorrow needed consolation for a long time. But they did not show him the third form which is especially consoling i.e. in words, for there follows, “and no one said a word to him.” The cause of their silence is shown when the text continues, “for they saw that his suffering was very great.” This cause is more an idea the consolers have than the state of the one afflicted. For when the mind of someone has been absorbed with pain, he does not listen to words of consolation, and so the poet Ovid remarks, “Who but someone who has no good sense, would forbid a mother to weep at the funeral of her child?” Job however had not been so disposed that he could not accept consolation because of great sorrow. Rather, he consoled himself very much according to reason as is apparent from the words quoted above.

END OF CHAPTER TWO

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Job

Chapter Two:



I know that my Redeemer lives, and that
in the end he will stand upon the earth.

- Job 19:25 -

The Second Trial

The commentary on the Book of Job, is by Saint Thomas Aquinas and was translated by Brian Mulladay and edited by Rev. Joseph Kenny, O.P. The book shows how human affairs are ruled by divine providence using probable arguments.

CHAPTER TWO – THE SECOND TRIAL

The First Lesson: Satan tries Job in his Flesh

1 Again on a certain day when the sons of God came to assist in the presence of the Lord Satan also came among them and assisted in his presence. 2 The Lord said to Satan: Where do you come from? Satan said in response: I have prowled about the earth and I have run through it. 3 The Lord said to Satan: Have you considered my servant Job; there is none like him on earth? He is a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns from evil? He still holds fast his innocence although you moved me against him to afflict him in vain. 4 Then Satan answered the Lord: Skin for skin! All that man has he will give for his life. 5 But now, put forth your hand and touch his bone and his flesh and you will see that he will curse (bless) you to your face. 6 The Lord said to Satan: Behold, he is in your hand, only spare his life.

Since there are three goods of man: of soul, of body and exterior things, these goods are so ordered to each other that the body exists for the sake of the soul, but exterior things exist for the sake of both the body and the soul. Therefore, just as one has a perverse intention if he subordinate the goods of the soul to prosperity in exterior goods, so one also has a perverse intention if he should order the goods of the soul to the health of the body. Job truly abounded in the acts of the virtues which are the goods of the soul. This was clear sensibly to all and so the Lord said to Satan above "Have you considered my servant Job, etc." [1:8] But Satan was inferring calumny as though Job intentionally performed acts of the virtues for temporal goods, just as evil men, also, whose prince is Satan, perniciously judge the intention of good men. But this calumny was rejected by the fact that after the loss of exterior goods, Job remained steadfast in virtue. This sufficiently proves that his intention had not been turned aside to exterior goods. There remained then to show for perfect demonstration of Job's virtue that his intention was not bent crooked for the health of his own body, and therefore divine judgment is invoked again to prove this. This is then what the text says, "Again on a certain day when the sons of God came to assist in the presence of the Lord, and Satan also came among them and assisted in his presence. The Lord said to Satan: Where do you come from?" Since these words have already been explained at length above, there is no need to delay over them here. Suffice it to note that because this passage recounts another action, another day is introduced here just at the beginning of Genesis different days are described according to the different kinds of things which were created. Thereupon what Satan answered under interrogation is shown when the text says, "From prowling and going about the earth." This has the same meaning as before. [1:7]

The devil not only strove to exasperate the mind of blessed Job through his wife, but also through his friends, who although they came to console him, yet went so far as words of rebuke. About this, the text says, "Now when Job's three friends heard of all the evil which had come upon him, they came, each from his own place: Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shu'ite, and Sophar the Naamathite." Because nearly the whole debate of this book occurs between these men, we must consider that these three were of the same opinion as Job in some respect and so they were called friends. In another respect they differed from him and were in agreement among themselves, and so they are numbered together with each other and are distinguished from Job. For indeed they agreed with Job that not only natural things but also human affairs were subject to divine providence, but they differed from him because they thought that man is rewarded for the good which he did with temporal prosperity by God and is punished for the evil which he does with temporal adversity by God, as though temporal goods are the rewards for virtues and temporal evils are the proper punishments of sins. Each one of these men strives to defend this opinion in his own way, as his own character suggested to him, because of this they are said to have come each from his own place." Now Job was not of this opinion, but he believed that the good works of men are ordered to a future spiritual reward after this life, and likewise sins should be punished with future punishments.

The next verse expresses the fact that these friends just mentioned came to console Job saying, "They agreed to come to visit him together and console him." In this they showed themselves to be true friends in not deserting him in a time of tribulation, for Sirach says, "A man's friend is recognized in sorrow and evil." (12:9) At first the visit itself was certainly consoling, for to see a friend and to associate with him is most delightful. They also console him by their actions, showing him signs of their compassion. What provoked these signs of compassion is now introduced. "When they saw him

In their afflictions, men customarily find solace in words of those offering consolation. But the affliction of Job was accompanied by irritating words, which were as much more provocative as the person who spoke them was more closely connected to him. The text continues, "Then his wife said to him," for she was the only person whom the devil left untouched so that through her he who had deceived the first man through a woman might assault the mind of the just man. This woman first broke out in words of mockery, "Do you still hold fast your simplicity?" as if she said: At least after so many chastisements you should know that it was useless for you to guard simplicity. The same is said by a person like her in the prophet Malachi, "It is vain to serve God. What is the profit in keeping his commandments." (3:14) Second, she proceeds to words of perverse suggestion saying, "Bless (i.e., Curse) God." as if she said: From the fact that adversity came upon you when you were blessing God, curse God and you will enjoy prosperity. Lastly, she concludes in words of despair saying, "and die", as if she said: Regard yourself as dead because nothing is left for you in remaining in simplicity except dying. Or "Bless God and die;" can be understood in another way to mean that since after so much reverence for God you have been so afflicted with adversity, if you still bless God, nothing remains, but for you to wait for death.

The holy man who had born his troubles patiently, could not bear the injury done to God, for there follows, "But he said to her: You have spoken like one of the foolish women speaks." He rightly accuses of foolishness one speaking against the divine wisdom. He shows that she spoke foolishly when he adds, "If we received good at the hand of the Lord and shall we not tolerate evil?" In this he teaches the perfect wisdom of man, for since temporal and corporeal goods should not be loved except because of spiritual and eternal ones, when the latter are conserved as the more principal ones, man should not be dejected if he is deprived of the former nor puffed up if he has an abundance of them. Job teaches us therefore that we should have such a steadfastness of spirit that both if temporal goods are given to us by God, we should so use them that we are not puffed up in pride from them, and we would so sustain the contrary evil that our soul is not dejected from their lack. This accords with what St. Paul says in Philippians in the last chapter, "I know how to be humbled and how to enjoy prosperity." (4:12) and further on, "I can do all things in him who gives me comfort." (4:13) Finally the conclusion is Job persevered in innocence when it is said, "In all these things Job did not sin with his lips."

Once again the Lord proposes the virtue of Job as something evident, and so there follows, "The Lord said to Satan: Have you considered my servant Job; there is none like him on earth? He is a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil." Since now a certain virtue of blessed Job which was not plain before has been clearly demonstrated, namely, his constancy in adversities, he therefore now adds, "He still," that is, after the loss of his temporal goods, "holds fast his innocence." From this the Lord shows further that Satan's suspicion was calumnious and that his intention has been frustrated, and so the text next says, "although you moved me against him to afflict him in vain." In saying, "You moved me against him," one must not understand that God was provoked by anyone into willing something he did not will before as is often the case with men. For according to Numbers, "God is not like a man, that he should lie, nor like a son of man that he should change." (23:19) Scripture here speaks of God figuratively acting in a human way. For when men want to do something because of someone's influence, they are said to be excited by that other one. God however wills to do something and so he does it, this because of that. Yet he does it without any excitement of mind because he had the reason he would do it in mind from all eternity. So the Lord had arranged from all eternity to afflict Job in time to prove the truth of his virtue in order to preclude every calumny of the wicked, and so to indicate this the text says, "You moved me against him." When the text adds, "to afflict him in vain," this must be understood from the point of view of the intention of Satan, not from the point of view of the intention of God. For Satan in intending the adversity of Job had desired from this to lead him into impatience and blasphemy, which did not follow as an effect. God however permitted this to proclaim his virtue openly, which in fact happened. So then Job was afflicted in vain from the point of view of the intention of Satan, but not from the point of view of the intention of God.

Though repulsed, Satan does not rest, but still provides calumny wanting to show that every good which Job did, even the very fact that he had patiently tolerated his adversity, he had not done for the love of God, but for the health of his own body. So the text continues, "Then Satan answered the Lord: Skin for skin! All that man has he will give for his life." We must reflect that Job had been afflicted in two ways: the loss of his possessions and the loss of his children. Satan therefore intends to say that Job had patiently tolerated both afflictions because of the health of his body and this was no great virtue in this, but was human and usual among men. This is what he says, "man," as though anyone even those without virtue will easily give, "skin for skin!" that is, the flesh of another in place of his own. For a man who is not virtuous will maintain that anyone else, even those closely related to him in any way, should be afflicted in body rather than himself. For the same reason every man regardless of who he is, will give all the exterior goods he possesses "for his life," that is, to preserve his own life. For exterior goods are sought to preserve life, like a supply of food and clothing and other such things which maintain the life of man comfortably.

Since someone could say to Satan, "How can you prove that Job bore patiently with the loss of his children and his possessions because he feared for his own skin and his own life?", he now adds, as though in answer to this objection, "But now," if you do not believe mere words," put forth your hand," i.e., exercise your power," and touch his bone and his flesh," i.e., afflict him in body, not only on the surface which is what to touch the flesh means, but also in its inmost part, which is what to touch the bone means, so that touch reaches to his inmost part. "And you will see," i.e., everyone can clearly perceive, "that he will bless (curse) you to your face," which must be interpreted as above.

Therefore the Lord willed to show that Job had not served God for the health of the body, just as he had already shown that Job did not serve him because of exterior goods, and so the text adds, "The Lord said to Satan: Behold, he is in your hand," i.e., I commit power to you to afflict him in body, "only spare his life," i.e., you cannot take away life from him. For God does not totally expose his servants to the will of Satan, but according to a fitting measure, as St. Paul says in 1 Cor., "The faithful God does not suffer you to be tempted beyond what you can endure." (10:13)

7 So Satan went forth from the face of the Lord and afflicted Job with loathsome sores from the sole of his feet to the crown of his head. 8 and he scraped the bloody matter with a shard and he sat in a dung heap. 9 Then his wife said to him: Do you still hold fast to your simplicity? Bless God and die. 10 But he said to her: You have spoken like one of the foolish women speaks. If we have received good at the hand of the Lord shall we not tolerate evil? In all these things Job did not sin with his lips. 11 Now when Job's three friends heard of all the evil which had come upon him, they came, each from his own place: Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shu'ite and Sophar the Naamathite. They agreed to come together, visit him and console him. 12 When they saw him from afar, they did not recognize him and raising their voices; they wept and they rent their robes and sprinkled dust upon their heads heavenward. 13 And they sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him for they saw that his suffering was very great.

When Satan had received the power, he proceeds to execute it. So the text continues, "So Satan went forth from the face of the Lord and afflicted Job," with what was truly an abominable and shameful blow. So the text says, "with sores," which were incurable and painful, i.e. "loathsome," entirely "from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head."

The afflictions of the sick are customarily alleviated by cures applied externally which are pleasant. But Job was not alleviated in such a way, for the text continues, "Job scraped the bloody matter with a shard." In this the text shows that pleasant and soothing remedies are not applied to him. "And he sat in a dung heap," in which the text shows that he did not restore himself to health in a pleasant place, or in the gentleness of straw or with some pleasant smell, but he more used their opposite. This can have happened in two ways: either because after he was struck by the Lord, he voluntarily afflicted and humiliated himself even more to more easily obtain mercy, or because he lost everything he had, and so he could not afford suitable cures for himself. This is probable enough from what the Lord said above, and it does not seem that Satan had acted except with the power given him to harm something. Pg 4