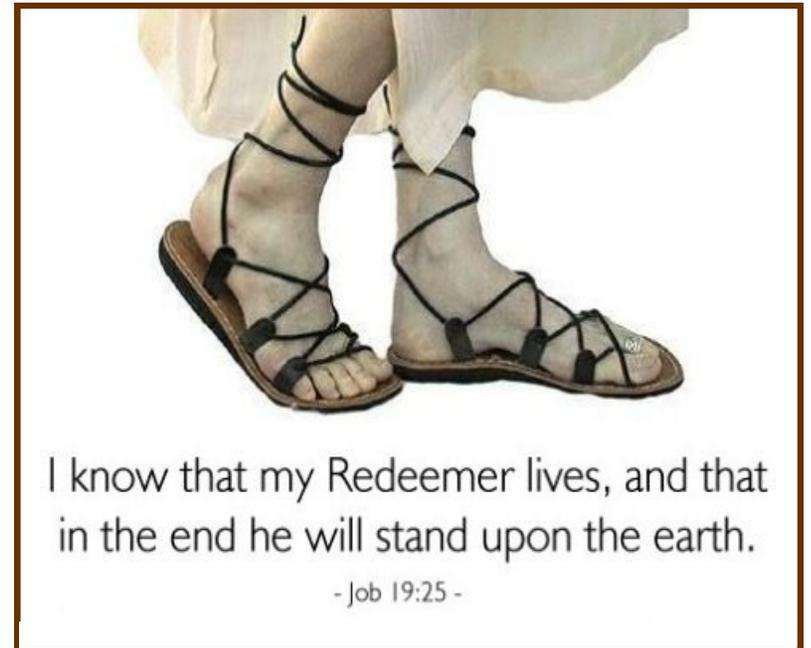


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Job

Chapter Twenty Seven:



Job Continues His Answer

*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 TWENTY SEVEN: JOB CONTINUES HIS ANSWER

The Lesson: The Prosperity of Evildoers is not against Divine Providence

1 Job also added to this taking up his allegory and said: 2 God lives who took away my judgment and the Almighty who made my soul bitter! 3 For while breath still exists in me and the spirit of God in my nostrils, 4 my lips will not speak evil nor my tongue practice deceit. 5 Far be it from me to judge you just; until I fall, I will not desert my innocence. 6 My justification which I in the beginning held, I will not abandon; for my heart has not accused me of anything my whole life long. 7 Just as the wicked man is my enemy, my adversary is evil, as it were. 8 What is the hope of the hypocrite if he should steal things greedily, and God not free his soul. 9 Will God hear his cry when anguish comes upon him? 10 Or will he be able find joy in the Almighty and invoke God every time? 11 I will teach you by the hand of God, what the Almighty has and I will not conceal it. 12 Behold, all of you know; why do you speak foolishness before God without proof? 13 This is the lot of the impious man and the heritage of the violent which they will receive from the Almighty. 14 If his children are multiplied, the sword will wait to kill them; and his grandchildren will hunger for bread. 15 Those others who follow him will be buried in ruin and their widows will not be lamented. 16 If he heaps up silver like earth and procures clothing like dust, 17 he truly has procured these things, but the just will wear those things and the innocent will divide his silver. 18 He has built his house like a moth; like a watchman makes a shelter. 19 He will open his eyes and he will find nothing. When the rich man goes to sleep he will take nothing with him. 20 It will overtake him like the water unexpectedly. In the night, the tempest will oppress him. 21 The blustering wind takes him away and will hear him away and like a whirlwind he is snatched from where he stands. 22 He will send someone on him and he will not spare him; and he will flee and escape his hand. 23 And a man will wring his hands over him and will sigh over him, considering his place.

In what preceded Job had successfully refuted the speech of Baldath, who had cited divine power against him, as though Job were ignorant of its greatness. When his response to Badath was finished, he understandably expected that the third of the friends, Sophar, would answer in the usual order. But since he remained silent as though he were convinced, Job takes up his speech a second time and shows through another argument that it is not against divine providence if the wicked prosper in this world and the good suffer adversities. So the text continues, "And Job also added to this," after no one answered him, "taking up again his allegory," because he was speaking through metaphors in the manner of those using allegories.

"The prayer of the man who turns his ear away so that he does not hear the law will be accursed."

Before he proves his proposition, he declares that he will never change to the opinion of his friends, and to establish this he begins with an oath. So the text continues, “and he said God lives who has taken away my judgment,” namely, supposing your opinion by which you affirm that it is only from the justice of divine judgment that it brings present adversities on sinners. So to explain in what way his judgment has been taken away he then says, “and the Almighty who made my soul bitter,” who without preceding fault has brought upon me exterior adversities which caused me to suffer bitterness in soul. Nevertheless, I do not fall away from his reverence and love. The proof of this is that I swear by him

END OF JOB CHAPTER 27

He relates this oath to what the text adds, "For while breath still exists in me," while I have life which is conserved by breathing. To show that he recognizes that the gift of life comes from God, he then says, "and the spirit of God is in my nostrils." For one breathes especially through the nostrils, and breathing through the mouth is not very fitting, as Aristotle says in his book, *The History of Animals*. So man's breathing, which has been placed principally in the nostrils is here said to be "the spirit of God," because man receives from God the ability to live by breathing. He does not want to show ingratitude for this gift by sinning, and so he says, "my lips will not speak evil," in saying everyone who suffers adversities is evil, "nor will my tongue practice deceit," in saying that it belongs to divine justice to reward the merits of the just by present prosperity and to punish the sins of the wicked by temporal adversity. Since the friends of Job has asserted opinions like this he adds, "Far be it from me to judge you just": for he could not judge them just unless he approved of their unjust opinion, in which he would be deviating from his own justice. So he says, "until I fall," in death, "I will not desert," for I do not intend to desert, "my innocence." I would desert my innocence if I with you judged the saints suffering adversity in this world to be evil. As I do not propose to change from innocence to harm, so I do not propose to desert the way of justice, and so he says, "My justification," which pertains to the execution of justice, "which I held in the beginning," by not approving a man for the prosperity which he has nor condemning him for the adversity which he suffers in this life, "I will not desert," in deviating to your opinion. Those who have sinned once are usually more prone to sin a second time, but those who do not know sin slip into sin with more difficulty, and so he then says, "for my heart has not accused me of anything my whole life long," as if to say: For that reason I am confident that I will not desert innocence nor justice because I have learned this from experience. For I do not have a remorseful conscience about any grave sin which I have done throughout my whole life. Or one can be connected in another way. Because he had said that he would not fall away from his innocence nor desert the justification which he had held in the beginning, someone could object that he had neither innocence nor justice before this. However, he disproves this when he says, "my heart has not accused me of anything and so on," for I would fall away from innocence and I would desert justice if I were to favor you who sustain injustice and impiety. So he says, "Just as the wicked man is my enemy," when he speaks against the truth of divine judgment, "my adversary is evil, as it were," inasmuch as he sustains an evil opinion in opposing me, saying that I am evil because I have been gravely afflicted.

Finally, he shows the frailty of earthly prosperity as to the person himself of man, who sometimes may die from some fever or some persecution. To express this he says, "The blustering wind takes him away," that is, will kill him with fever, "and will bear him away," from the society of the living. This will happen suddenly and unexpectedly, and so the text continues, "and like a whirlwind he will be snatched from where he stands," violently and without delay. Sometimes, however, he is not killed by interior weakness, but by an exterior persecutor, and so he says, "He" (God) "will send," some persecutor, "on him," who is more powerful than he, whom he cannot resist, "and he (the persecutor) will not spare him." "He" (the evil man) "will flee from his hand," from his power, "and escape," either by flight or by death because, "after he has died, he has nothing more to do." (Luke 12:4) Once he is dead, awe and mourning remain for his friends, and so he then says, "and a man will wring his hands over him," as though struck with awe, "and will sigh over him" from compassion for him, "considering his place," when they consider his former dignity.

Spacious houses are also signs of earthly prosperity, but he shows these to be perishable for two reasons. First, because sometimes he builds a house for himself by violence on another's land after he has been driven out, and so he says, "he has built his house like a moth," which procures a place for himself by knowing another's clothing, by whom he is expelled when the clothing is shaken out. In another way he shows it because even if he builds a house on his own land, he still cannot care and possess that house for a long time, but for a short time, and so he says, "like a watchman," of a vineyard, "makes a shelter," which he demolishes when his time as watchman is finished. He shows how he loses the goods he had acquired when he says, "When a rich man goes to sleep," when he dies, "he will take nothing" of his possessions with him to the other life. "He will open his eyes," in the resurrection, "and will find nothing," because he will not return to possess temporal goods. Sometimes even in this life he suddenly loses them in the way in which rain suddenly comes on a man, and so he says, "It will overtake him like the water," of the rain, "unexpectedly," because it comes suddenly upon him. Although the rain can be anticipated in the daytime in some way, yet at night it suddenly overtakes man, and so he says, "in the night the tempest" if adversity "will oppress him," will take him completely by surprise.

After discussing these arguments to refute his friends and strengthen his own opinion, he goes on to his principal proposition which is that it is not contrary to divine providence if the evil prosper temporally in this world and the just are afflicted temporally. He has clearly shown this above, (19:25 and 21:32) using future rewards and punishments which are reserved to the good and the evil after this life. But now he demonstrates this by the weakness of temporal goods which evildoers possess in this life and the greatness of the spiritual goods which are granted to the good. (c.28) He first maintains that it is useless for sinners if they attain temporal goods in this life without the goods of the soul, and so he says, "What is the hope of the hypocrite if he should steal things greedily," if he should gather riches unjustly, "and God not free his soul," from sin through the gifts of grace? What good can he attain from this? He uses the hypocrite or tactician to stand for all sinners because, "equity pretended is evil twice over." Also, hypocrites, as falsely virtuous, appear especially reprehensible in the eyes of God. As he later says, "Tacticians and cunning men provoke the anger of God." (36:13)

He shows as a consequence that they are deprived of hope in two ways. One of these is the hope the just have that God hears their prayer in time of need, but he excludes this by saying, "Will God hear his cry when anguish comes upon him?" He implies the answer "No." The reason for this is found in the book of Proverbs when the voice of Wisdom says, "I have called and you refused me," (1:24) and continues a little later, "Then," when anguish will come upon them, "they will invoke me and I will not hear." (1:28) Further on in the same book he says, "The prayer of the man who turns his ear away so that he does not hear the law will be accursed." (28:9) The second hope of the just is that when they lack temporal consolation in time of trial, they enjoy delight in God and are delighted in his praise, but he excludes this from the impious man saying, "Or will he be able to find joy in the Almighty," whom he did not love as his works prove, "and invoke God in every time?" For from great love of God some men always praise God in speech.

After he has shown the small value of the temporal goods which the evil possess without the hope of the just which the saints have, he shows as a consequence that the temporal goods which the impious sometimes possess are fragile. Before asserting what he is about to say, he begins with two things. First, what he will say accords with divine wisdom, and so he says, "I will teach you by the hand of God," by his strength, "what the Almighty has," fixed in his wisdom, "and I will not conceal it," what I learned when God instructed me. Second, he shows that what he is about to say is so clear that even they cannot be ignorant of it, and so he says, "Behold all of you know," what I am about to say is true, and so it is strange that you speak so irrationally against the plain truth. He expresses this theme saying, "and why do you speak foolishness without proof," that is, things with no reasonable support? For men are dull when they know the premises, but usually do not perceive the conclusion which follows from them.

Consider that since God is the Creator and Governor of all things, all receive something from him like an inheritance from a father. Evil men receive from God the temporal goods of this world as their share and their inheritance, and Wisdom speaks in their name saying, "This is our portion and our lot. (17:16) Inversely, the good understand spiritual goods as their portion and inheritance, according to the Psalm, "The hopes have fallen for me on outstanding levels and my heritage is outstanding." (15:16) When, therefore, he describes how frail and perishable is the lot of the impious which they receive in temporal things, he says, "This is the lot of the impious man before God," i.e., such is what comes to them as a lot when spiritual goods are distributed to the good and temporal goods to them, "and the inheritance of violent men," i.e., who unjustly acquire temporal goods, "which they will receive from the Almighty," i.e., he is the one who permits and furnishes the power to get them, as Job has already said, "when he fills their houses with good things." (22:18) For he shows that this share or inheritance is perishable first as to what happens for the most part to the children of evil men, which are held in great esteem among temporal goods. The sons of evil men who have prospered in this world are sometimes killed, and so he says, "If his children are multiplied," which was held a sign of great prosperity, "the sword will wait to kill them," i.e. they will be killed. Although it rarely happens that the sons of a rich man fall into great poverty, yet this happens frequently to their grandsons and descendants, and so he then says, "and his grandchildren will hunger for bread," because of want. As to those other members of his household, he says, "those others who follow him," his domestics and friends, "are will be buried in ruin," without solemnity like people killed, and as to their wives he says, "and their widows will not be lamented," which usually happens in solemn funerals.

As the happiness of his sons and friends is frail and perishable and the same is true of the man made riches he possesses among these are certain artificial riches like money, which was devised as the measure of the exchange of things, as Aristotle says. As to this he says, "If he heaps up silver like dust," that is, if he should acquire as great a supply of money as is had on earth. The same is also true for his natural riches, which provide for the natural necessity of men, like bread and wine, clothing and other things like this. As to these he says, "and has procured his clothing like dust," so that he should have as great a supply of clothes as the dust. "Truly he has indeed procured these things," that is, has expended care and labor in procuring them, yet another will have the fruit, and sometimes a good man who is not interested in this sort of thing. So he says, "but the just will wear those things," clothing in his need, "and the innocent will divide his silver," for he will distribute and give it to the poor. He will not keep it amassed in storage which would be against his innocence.