

Meditation on Psalm 88:1-18

The darkness is my closest friend

Psalm 88 is a cry for help and a prayer of trust in God by one who is trapped in dark experiences of life. Psalm makes emotions of fear, doubts, questioning, as part of prayer. Psalm expresses similar sentiments of despair as in the Book of Job and accuses God for his suffering saying: '*you put me in the pit*' [verse 4]. Psalmist's life is either threatened by terminal illness or he was surrounded by inimical forces. Psalm also could be the feelings of the whole community when under siege or in exile! Psalm is a heartrending cry [often our life experience], and psalmist speaks to God as a friend but he sees no end to his suffering. He feels like God doesn't care! Yet his thoughts are a prayer of faith and says: '*I cry out in your presence*'; no human power can rescue him; God is behind his distress [*understand as not receiving any comfort or healing*] and he alone can save him [*not giving up hope*]. Here, suffering is not necessarily looked at as evil but as a passage to deeper encounter with God the giver of life. Psalmist uses his suffering as a time of self-reflection and he abandons himself to God's mercy that redeems his life!

Psalmist believes that God's anger is directed against him [verses 7, 14, 16]. Friends of Job counseled him that God was angry at Job but their claims were proven false. *God's anger* is just the thoughts of the psalmist in extreme anguish, the pain of waiting for healing! His friends too have forsaken him; loneliness eats up his life! Fear of utter forgetfulness by God breaks his heart. However, Psalmist clings to God and prays continuously, though no solace has visited him in his suffering. His lamentation is addressed to '*God of his salvation*' [v.1]. Psalmist seeks the assurance of God lifting him up, well-being now and ever-well-being in the life to come!

Suffering is a reality of life; people go through it in varied degrees; suffering seems to be built into the very fabric of creation! Suffering is not to comprehend but rather **face it with and within God**. God became man in Jesus Christ is in a way God incarnated into human suffering. Jesus himself doesn't give direct answers to the 'why' of suffering. Jesus spoke of 'lifting up and rising from the dead', the redemptive spark infused in suffering. We can say life-suffering/death are two sides of the same coin, both have to find their transformed existence in God. Suffering doesn't make sense apart from God in it. Many psalms and the Book of Job struggled with the question of suffering of the innocent. They found that suffering is humanly incomprehensible just as God is incomprehensible! What one can do is to surrender in love to the source of life! God's answer to suffering is given at the foot of the cross of Christ, in Jesus' words: '*I commend my spirit into thy hands*'; I ask no more questions, seek no more answers, I surrender!

Father Jose