

Understanding Suffering from God's Vision

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"Why does God create a world filled with evil and suffering?" This has been one of the most common questions asked by catechumens in their catechumenate.

Being a mysterious creator, God creates beauty as well as evil in our human world. His wisdom in creation goes far beyond man's understanding. While Job was suffering from his physical and spiritual misery, the Lord answered him out of the whirlwind:

"Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?
Tell me, if you have understanding
Who determined its measurements - surely you know!
Or who stretched the line upon it?
On what were its bases sunk,
Or who laid its cornerstone when the morning stars sang together
And all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?"



In the Old Testament, Job was a tragic character tested by God who led him to understand the flimsiness of the physical world and the deep meaning of human suffering which is the threshold of eternity. Likewise, the protagonist, Pi, in the story *Life of Pi* by Yann Martel has a profound interest in God who leads him to understand the meaning of suffering through his unusual adventure with a tiger, Richard Parker, on a life raft. Instead of questioning the God's intention of placing a dangerous and fearful animal as his sole companion in the middle of Pacific Ocean after the sinking of the ship and the loss of all his family members, Pi displays a positive attitude towards his suffering. Literally speaking, through the tiger as a symbol, the story reflects our human connection to God who allows vice and virtues existing together in mankind.

A recent incident happened at Toronto astounded most Canadians over the country. On Monday, April 23, Alek Minassian, a 25-year-old man, plowed into pedestrians with a rented van, resulting in 10 people dead and 14 hurt. So far the motive behind his attack is still unknown. Both believers and non-believers of God may ask the same question: "Why does God permit evil and suffering in this world?"

Both the authors of the *Book of Job* and *Life of Pi* have brought us an element of suffering and a strong build towards God together with a sense of ultimate realization from the characters' experience that they have gone through. The description of Job and Pi's suffering helps us

understand the meaning of life and how such experiences shape us today as humans. From the spiritual point of view, because of original sin, our suffering is a part of being human. As a result, we come to understand that we all start off as being innocent, but then grow up into life realizing the limitation as a being created by the all mighty God and acknowledging how true it is as said in Proverbs, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight” (Proverbs 9:10)

In the story ‘Life of Pi’, Pi starts as a small, innocent child who then grows up to being a wise adult. Nurtured by his tragic experiences, Pi gains enough strength to move forward in life and allows his mind to realize that suffering occurs in our human world as a cruel but real nature.

“The reason death sticks so closely to life isn’t biological necessity, it’s envy. Life is so beautiful that death has fallen in love with it, as jealous, possessive love that grabs at what it can. But life leaps oblivion lightly, losing only a thing or two of no importance, and gloom is just passing shadow of a cloud.” (Martel,6)

“I was giving up. I would have given up, if a voice hadn’t made itself heard in my heart. The voice said, “I will not die.....I will beat the odds, as great as they are. I have survived so far, miraculously. Now I will turn a miracle into a routine. This amazing miracle will be seen every day. I will put in all the hard work necessary. Yes, as long as God is with me, I will not die. Amen.” (Martel, 163)

The quotes show how Pi matures as time continues and he has learned about the beauty of life. His journey on the life raft and being on the edge of death let him understand that death is pushing him strongly to believe in God. In a similar manner, Job came to the Lord through his suffering and learned how to surrender himself to the all mighty God who restored the physical and spiritual beings of him. For the materialistic life, the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before. Then there came to him all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before. They showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the Lord had brought upon him. As a reward for Job’s endurance, the Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning. Job reflected on God’s plan on him and at last he did not complain but praised:

“I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge? Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.” (Job 42:2-3)

May the Holy Spirit guide us and help us have a deeper understanding of the Words in the Books of Wisdom where our Lord has laid His answers for the question “Why does God create a world filled with evil and suffering?”