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Dear Friends

Job makes his appearance this Sunday. He is our friend in these days of pandemic. Does that sound strange? A careful reading of the Book of Job convinces us that his words are poorly understood. He is not simply a moaner, a miserable man. Why? Because after the unbelievable calamity that falls on him and his family, and the long conversation he has with his friends, seemingly descending further into a spiral of despair, Job finally understands. He sees his life, his tragedies, in the bigger picture. He realises that he is not God. He does not have the answers. He recovers a better life, a deeper happiness.

How, then, is Job a friend to us in these difficult days? His words will surely resonate with us; bewilderment, astonishment, shock. What did I do to deserve this? Why has this happened? What have I done wrong? As the roller coaster of this pandemic has carried us with it; the shock of the first lockdown, the apparent liberation of the summer, the gathering gloom of the autumn and the grim days of this cold winter, our emotions have surely been all over the place!

But what actually causes Job to go into an emotional meltdown? It is his loss of control. He has lost control of his life. Everything has been taken away from him. He cannot even save his own family from the tragedies that befall them. He arrives at desperation point and stays there. How many of us are there with him? So much that is familiar has been taken away. Our freedoms are severely limited. We have all had our Job moments. Where will it all end?

But it ends well. Job recovers. How on earth does anyone recover from that depth of personal tragedy? He does not mince his words to God. He gives full rein to his frustration and anger. He leaves God in no doubt about how he feels. He demands answers. Here is a way forward for our conversations with God in these days. Job teaches us to be honest, open and straightforward in our prayer. Frustration? Anger? Fear? Let it find a voice when we speak to God, to empty it out before Him.

Only when God finally speaks does Job begin to see, to understand. God wants us to step out of our small world, to see the bigger picture. God is God. I am not. My struggles may be heavy going, but look over there, or over here; others crushed and struggling as well. In the middle of it all is God. Suffering. Part of every life.

The happy ending to Job's life is not that he makes up with God. It is not that he sees the error of his ways. It is that he has finally learned to let go. He has learned to open his hands and say with complete sincerity; 'I came into this world with nothing. I shall leave it with nothing.' In other words, in the things that really matter, it is God who guides, controls, directs. Not me. To see this and to begin to accept it is truly the first step to lasting happiness. We cannot reach this point on our own.



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But when God gives us a helping hand towards true and lasting happiness, our hope must be that our bewilderment and frustration will eventually give way to surrender and humility.

May God bless you and your loved ones.

Father John



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