

**5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter (Year C): Dawn follows night: optimism!**  
**First Reading: Acts 14:20-26: Paul & Barnabas recount success;**  
**Second Reading: Apoc. 21:1-5: New Jerusalem – fresh hope;**  
**Gospel: John 13:31-35: Jesus’ passion is really his ‘glory’.**

One of our commonest phrases in English is “making the best out of a bad job”. To me, it suggests a plucky ‘Dunkirk’ spirit, where we overcome some awful problem and try to be happy with what we can salvage from the mess. This is how many of us get through life, but it was not the case for early Christians. Their “mess” was facing persecution – initially from Jewish leaders (as we’ve seen in recent weeks) - then, as the faith spread into Greece and Italy, from the Roman authorities. They accepted persecution as their share in Jesus’ own suffering. But that led to their biggest problem of all - how to explain why Jesus, God’s ‘chosen one’, had to suffer & die in the first place. It raises the issue of suffering’s link with faith in a loving God.

It’s a serious problem. In the first reading, Paul & Barnabas said, “We all have to experience many hardships, before we enter the Kingdom of God.” This implies future happiness after present trouble. The same comes across in the 2<sup>nd</sup> reading, from Apocalypse: “He will wipe away tears from their eyes. There will be no more death, mourning or sadness. The world of the past has gone.” Both readings assume that everyday suffering will give way to a better life in the future. But is it right that our present life should be full of trouble? Do we have to believe that our life on earth must be miserable?

Traditionally, the Book of Genesis taught that the world had been perfectly made by God at the start; it was later ruined by the sin of disobedience by our first parents – Adam & Eve. This corruption made the world a dangerous place – full of suffering and death, resulting in humans having a short, misery-filled life. As explanations go, it sounds reasonable – but it is taken literally by few nowadays, unless they are head-in-the-sand fundamentalists. A recent article in “The Tablet”

periodical said that most practising Christians (of all churches) accept the modern scientific approach to both evolution and the age of the universe. Where we can accept the Genesis story, I think, is in its psychology: how people deceive themselves, refusing to accept what they know (or suspect) is best for them - God's will.

I suggest our life in the world is 'miserable' in so far as it is limited by time, money, geography and climate. No-one can live for ever, so to see death as 'punishment' is no longer accepted. No, the real issue is how we use our brains and resources to make everyone's life better – or worse. The cause of so much third-world poverty is partly geography & climate, partly exploitation by richer countries, and (sadly) partly mismanagement. For ourselves, we know we weaken as we age – that's the way life moves on. (This writer is very aware of that!) Sickness & death are bad enough (especially when young people suffer & die), but it's made far worse by human malice.

This is where we come to this Sunday's gospel. Jesus, aware that his death was approaching (helped along by Judas' departure to betray him), said strangely: "Now has the Son of Man been glorified, and in him God has been glorified." He actually saw his betrayal, arrest and death as his GLORY. This overturning of what we would call "normal happiness" was the sign of God's supreme love for us. I think it's the only answer we can give when people ask us why a loving Creator let the world develop in a way that leads to suffering & death. It's the way Creation has evolved: without the birth-growth-maturity-sickness-death cycle, life as we know would not be possible.

Jesus' "glory" was that God allowed this to happen to his own Son - with the added malice of human betrayal & torture. This proves how much God loves us, and wants to be part of our daily existence. But more: the fact that the Father raised Jesus from the dead gives us real hope. Yes, we must make the best world possible here; but then there is another life - very different, but better. *Fr Jim Dunne.*