Questioning the Goodness of God

      Throughout history, man has demonstrated his ability to do great evil. And when evildoers suffer for their misdeeds, it can be tempting to consider it “divine justice.” We may even delight in their suffering. But when the consequences of man’s evil actions impact others who are then made to suffer through no fault of their own, it can cause some to doubt the goodness of God. How easy it is to turn away from God when we see this kind of injustice, to blame God and question the love he has for his people. The desire to understand this paradox of an all-loving God who allows for the existence of evil and for the suffering of the innocent has been constant throughout human history. But this is the riddle which needs to be examined, even if imperfectly and incompletely, if we are to understand what some have called the "problem of God," because the real problem, I believe, is with us.

      God is love. And through love, the world was created. The Book of Genesis details the story of creation which culminates with God creating man and placing him in the Garden of Eden. God, out of pure love, chose to create man. And man, because of the love through which he is created, is made to choose God. But choice itself is a gift. God does not compel or demand that we choose Him, for that would not be an act of love.

      St. Thomas Aquinas provides this definition of love: “To love is to will the good of the other.” God's will for mankind is to share His goodness with us. When God looked upon His creation as He spoke it into existence, He saw how good it was. At this point, we may ask, what does it mean to be *good*? Aristotle calls a thing *good* when it serves the purpose for which it was made. From all this God-given goodness within the garden, man had the freedom to choose from all but one tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and bad. Eating from this tree would doom man to death not because the fruit itself was deadly. The choice itself became man’s downfall because man freely chose his to follow his own will and turned away from the good for which we were created.

So, is it right to blame God when man must live with the consequence of his own choice or the choice of another? Or does our choice diminish God's goodness? We need only read the book of Job to see how the righteous can suffer a great deal. However, we are reminded in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 that “our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.” We, for our part, are to keep our focus on God and trust in what we already know to be true. A statement made by Father Mike Schmitz during one of his recent podcasts led me to this song and its beautiful chorus from the song “True in the Light” by Rend Collective:

*What’s true in the light is true in the darkness*

*Though sorrow is real, You won’t let it break us*

*So we sing in the night and trust in Your promises*

*You’re true in the light and true in the darkness*

Whether the suffering is self-inflicted or through the fault of others, our response is the key: will we choose to turn to God and trust in His goodness and His love for us or will we turn away from God and choose to forget His goodness? As we enter this season of Lent, it is humbling to reflect on the gift of choice and how important our choices are to our spiritual life. Each choice is an opportunity to strengthen our relationship with God, and it remains one of the greatest gifts given to us by God.