**The Universal Pattern Why Suffering? Tuesday,  April 14, 2020**

Sooner or later, the heart of everybody’s spiritual problem is “What we do with our pain? Why is there evil? Why is there suffering?” Job begs God for an answer to this mystery, and he can’t get one. He only begins to trust when he no longer feels ignored, when he knows that God is taking him seriously and that he is “part of the conversation” (see Job 42). When Jesus later becomes the answer in his own passion, death, and resurrection, he discovers what Job finally experienced: in the midst of suffering, God can be trusted. The world is still safe, coherent, and even blessed.

We are “saved” by being addressed and included in a cosmic conversation. We do not really need answers; we need only to be taken seriously as part of the dialogue. But we usually only know this in hindsight after the suffering and the struggle. It cannot be known beforehand, not theoretically or theologically. Our knowledge of God is participatory. God refuses to be intellectually “thought,” and is only known in the passion and pain of it all, when the issues become soul-sized and worthy of us.

Jesus says, “There’s only one sign I’m going to give you: the sign of the prophet Jonah” (see Luke 11:29, Matthew 12:39, 16:4). Sooner or later, life is going to lead us (as it did Jesus) into the belly of the beast, into a situation that we can’t fix, can’t control, and can’t explain or understand. That’s where transformation most easily happens. That’s when we’re uniquely in the hands of God. Right now, it seems the whole world is in the belly of the beast together. But we are also safely held in the loving hands of God, even if we do not yet fully realize it.

All of us experience the absurd, the tragic, the nonsensical, the unjust, but we do not all experience pain in the same way, so try not to judge others too harshly for their reactions. We don’t know what has brought them to this point. However, if we could see all our wounds as the way through to their transformative effect, as Jesus did, then they would become “sacred wounds” and not something to deny, disguise, or export to others.

The genius of Jesus’ teaching is that he reveals that God uses tragedy, suffering, pain, betrayal, and death itself, not to wound or punish us, but to bring us to a Larger Identity: “Unless the single grain of wheat loses its shell, it remains just a single grain” (see John 12:24). The shell must first crack for the expanded growth to happen. In such a divine economy, everything can be transmuted, everything can be used, and nothing is wasted.