

Fr. Romeo Evangelista's Homily  
June 21, 2020  
Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)

The 1992 Disney Musical Aladdin was a delightful animated version of the classic Arabian Nights tale of Aladdin and the magic lamp. It reminded me of the central role of the genie in that story, namely, the servant who appears whenever someone rubs a magic lamp and fulfills that person's every wish.

A lot of Christians imagine God more or less like a benevolent genie whose main function is to solve our problems, eliminate obstacles, remove suffering, and prevent disasters from happening. Well, today's gospel reading should dispel once and for all this fantasy about God, for it is only that, a fantasy. God's way of interfering in our lives is very different from that of a genie. In this passage of the gospel, Jesus is as realistic as can be. In this discourse known as the Mission Discourse, he is perfectly honest and blunt, "Do not fear those who deprive the body of life," he tells his disciples and us, thus implicitly predicting that a certain number of his followers in the course of history will be killed. Then he adds that not a single sparrow falls to the ground without God being aware of it and allowing it to happen. But the sparrow does fall! Finally, he reassures us that every hair on our head is counted, yet, it does fall! In other words, God does not act like a genie, preventing bad things from happening. And this thought should dispel once and for all the genie-myth. God is not a magical genie and there is no magic lamp capable of conjuring him.

If that is the case, then, what is God's role in our times of trial? These spiritual authors share their thoughts with us on this difficult issue. The first two are brief and somewhat cryptic. The third one is lengthier and crystal clear.

The first spiritual master is Dame Julian of Norwich, a 14<sup>th</sup> century anchoress who wrote with great profundity and wisdom about the knowledge of good and of ourselves. This is what she says on this issue of God's providence: "God", she states, "did not say you will never have a rough passage, you will never be overstrained, you will never feel uncomfortable", but God did say, "You will never be overcome".

Our second spiritual master is Robert Farrar Capon. He is an Anglican priest and specialist in fine cuisine, who published some 30 books combining his insights about cooking and about God: "What Christianity promises", he writes, "is not the removal of evil from the world, but the taking of this twisted world into the mystery of Christ's suffering, death and resurrection".

Our third and final spiritual master, Horrace O. Duke, is a man familiar with suffering and trials, having served for many years as hospital chaplain and pastoral counselor. This is what he writes in his book, "Where Is God When Bad Things Happen?"

"God", he answers, "is within us, calling us to faith, luring us to go on living to believe that there is meaning in life despite what happens to us. When things happen that we have no power to change, God experiences it with us. At that moment all the power of the universe is at our disposal to do the one thing that only we can do: rise above it, live through it, give meaning to our experience, and find purpose in life in spite of or because of what has happened."

"We have lived too long with the erroneous belief that God changes things. We've made God into something God is not, 'a fixer of things', the magical genie of those who rub God the right way. God does not change things or circumstances. God does change people. God's grace is not addressed to circumstances and wants. Rather God's grace is addressed to people as they face life events and live in their circumstances. We witness the presence and power of God when a person's spirit is changed and empowered to live with meaning and purpose. The perpetuation of evil is proof of the depravity of humanity. Rising above evil, transcending it, is proof of human's goodness inspired by divine grace".

In other words, God does not magically remove suffering from our lives. But he gives us the strength to bear it and to profit immensely from it. He did not protect his own Son from suffering, but through suffering he made him strong enough to save the world.

Amen