

Theme: God is with us in our suffering

Let us pray.

Most holy, Lord God, we pray for the repose of the soul of Eileen Clancy; may Eileen and all the saints enjoy light and life with you, we pray through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

We are here today to remember Eileen Clancy. Eileen attended here at Our Saviour for a short time. She was no longer safe living on her own and moved to Texas to have more care.

Dementia has two sides. For those of us who love and know someone with dementia, it is a heart-breaking, soul-stealing disease. For the person who suffers from dementia, their world is the one that is normal. They know they are fully capable of doing the tasks they wish to do. If they forget to turn off the stove, it is because they never turned it on in the first place. After all, how can they keep track of people who enter their homes and turn on appliances without their knowledge or consent?

For them, the things and people they no longer recognize never existed. It is very difficult to convince a dementia patient that they suffer from that affliction, because their view of reality is not ours.

Though she may not have been fully aware of her condition, Eileen suffered. It is the reading we had from Wisdom that helps us deal with suffering and gives us hope for eternal redemption.

There are obviously two sides at work in this passage from Wisdom: the righteous and the foolish. The author is on the side of the righteous and offers comfort for the righteous, who in spite of their righteousness, have and are suffering greatly.

This is how chapter three begins. The righteous are protected by God and they will not be tormented. We might say, "Yeah, but righteous people do get tormented and God doesn't protect them." That's not what this is saying. What it is saying is that the *dead* are with God and they cannot be hurt again.

The foolish, on the other hand, think that dead is dead and that their lives meant nothing. But unknown to the foolish, the dead are at peace. Why are the righteous at peace in death? As long as they were alive, the righteous warred with their evil impulses. In death, they rest from this internal conflict.

Even though they appear to be punished, they have immortal hope. In the Book of Job, Job's so-called friends thought Job was being punished for his sins. Yet, Job was the most righteous person on earth. Job had a hope of justification, if not in his lifetime, then in the next life. Job knew his friends were wrong. Job knew he was a good person. Like Job, the righteous will be tested and they will receive a great reward.

The righteous are tried as gold is tried. It wasn't just the Jews who thought like this. Seneca, the Roman philosopher wrote, "Fire test gold, misfortune brave men. . . . God does not make a spoiled pet of a good man, he tests him, hardens him, and fits him for his own service."

In Jesus' time, it was a common theological idea that suffering is punishment from God. Maybe it was seen as a divine smack to keep us in check. But those not favored by God, such as anyone who persecuted Jews, they will get theirs in the end and it will be a sudden and total devastation. This thought is repeated in 1 Peter 1:6 and 5:10.

The righteous will blaze forth like sparks in stubble. Sparks in stubble creates a fire, as we in California know all too well. But, I think, all of us have seen sparks fly into the air when the logs in a fire are moved around. Pre-Christian Jewish apocalyptic writers saw themselves as a star-like future of righteousness, as seen in Daniel, 1 Enoch, and other writings.

The righteous will govern the nations of the earth, with God as king or emperor. In Daniel, ". . . judgment will come to the saints and they will possess the kingdom" (Daniel 7:22). This verse from Daniel is almost repeated verbatim in Matthew, 1 Corinthians, and Revelation.

Those who trust in God will receive true understanding. They will live with God in a state of love. God will give them grace and compassion. God will visit his chosen ones.

Life is not defined by death. Death is not divine judgment. God created us for life eternal. Our destiny is to be in righteous relationship with God and with one another. God does not instigate suffering. God desires to work with us through suffering. Mercy and love are God's gifts to us in this life and in the next. The foolish are blind to God's desire for creation. Creation is designed for life with God.

We will follow Eileen, inheriting an eternal place with God with grace and mercy.

Text: **Wisdom of Solomon** 3:1–5, 9 (NRSV)

- 3** But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God,
and no torment will ever touch them.
2 In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died,
and their departure was thought to be a disaster,
3 and their going from us to be their destruction;
but they are at peace.
4 For though in the sight of others they were punished,
their hope is full of immortality.
5 Having been disciplined a little, they will receive great good,
because God tested them and found them worthy of himself;
9 Those who trust in him will understand truth,
and the faithful will abide with him in love,
because grace and mercy are upon his holy ones,
and he watches over his elect.^{a1}

^a Text of this line uncertain; omitted by some ancient authorities. Compare 4:15

¹ *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Wis 3:1–5, Wis 3:9). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.