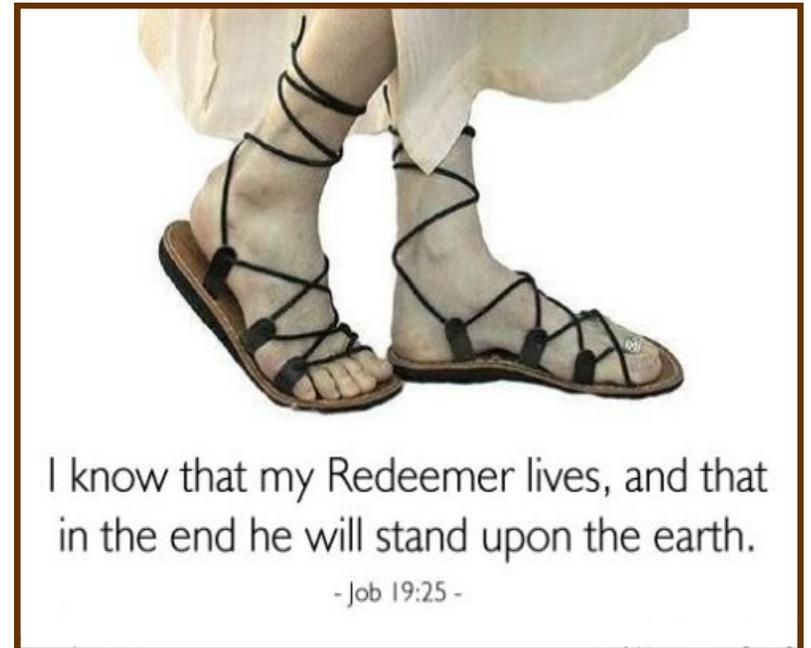


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Job

Chapter Fourteen:



True Retribution

The commentary on the Book of Job, is by Saint Thomas Aquinas and was translated by Brian Mulladay and edited by Rev. Joseph Kenny, O.P. The book shows how human affairs are ruled by divine providence using probable arguments.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN: TRUE RETRIBUTION

The First Lesson: Wonder about Divine Care

1 Man, born of woman, lives for a short time, is filled with many sorrows: 2 who like a flower comes forth and is crushed, and he flees like a shadow, he never rests in the same state. 3 And you consider it worthy to open your eyes on someone like this and you bring him with yourself in judgment. 4 Who can make clean one conceived of unclean seed, if not you alone?

Since this last point is of particular value for the investigation of the truth, he insists more on clarifying this truth. What he had said about himself in particular he applies again generally to the whole human race.

Here he first explains the frailty of the human condition, as to origin when he says, "Man, born of woman," like from something frail; as to duration when he says, "lives for a short time"; and as to condition when he says, "is filled with many sorrows." Here he explains what he said above, "Do you show your power against the leaf which is driven by the wind?" (v.25)

Second he excludes those things in which a man can take glory; the first among these is the beauty of the body with which a man is strong in his youth. But this glory is nothing because it passes quickly like the flower. So he says, "Who like a flower comes forth and is crushed," easily. The second is fame, which does not last for a long time, and so he says, "and he flees like a shadow." For no trace or memory of a shadow which passes remains. The third is power and strength with which someone tries to preserve himself and his own things, and against this he says, "he never rests in the same state." These three things can refer to the three others which the previous verse treats. For man born of woman is like a flower which comes forth and is quickly crushed, but he lives for so brief a time so that he flees like a shadow whose trace does not remain. Therefore he is filled with many sorrows so that though at times he might acquire prosperity and joy, yet he would never rest in the same state.

***The state of human death,
until whatever time resurrection is deferred,
is brief in comparison to the state of future immortality.***

The life of man can neither extend more nor less than the limits determined according to divine providence, under which everything falls.

Third, he wonders about the attentiveness of divine providence for man. For it seems marvelous that God should have such great care about a thing so fragile and despicable. Although everything is submitted to divine providence, still God's care for man appears especially in three things.

First, he has given him laws and precepts for living. He touches this when he says, "and you consider it worthy open your eyes on someone like this," for someone is said to open his eyes on someone when he directs him and considers his ways.

Second, God rewards man for good deeds and punishes him for evil deeds, and he touches this when he says, "and bring him with yourself in judgment."

Third, God adorns him with the virtues by which he preserves himself pure against the deformity of sin. He touches this when he says, "Who can make clean one conceived of unclean seed?" The seed of man is certainly unclean, not according to nature, but according to the infection of concupiscence. Yet a man conceived from this unclean seed is sometimes proven pure by virtue. As the power to make hot what is cold belongs to what is hot in itself, so the power to make pure what is impure belongs to what is pure in itself, and so he says then, "If not you alone," who are really pure in yourself?

For purity and cleanliness are found perfectly only in God, in whom there can be no potentiality or defect. So whatever is clean and pure in any way takes this purity and cleanness from God.

The Second Lesson: The Hope for Another Life

5 The days of man are short, the number of his months are in your presence. You set up limits which cannot be passed. 6 Leave him a little while so that he might rest until the desired day comes like a hired man.

Job had wondered about the divine esteem for men, since man is still of such a frail and unhappy condition, considered in the state of the present life. But this wonder would cease if one considers that after this life there is another life reserved for man in which he remains in eternity, and so from here on he tries to show this. Therefore he presupposes what he intends to show as a proposition, the brevity of the present life, when he says, "The days of man are short." He shows that the very measure of human life is determined by God, when he says, "the number of his months is in your presence," as we say the number of those things is in our presence whose number is established by us. Moreover, he uses the unchangeableness of divine determination as a premise when he says, "You set up limits which cannot be passed."

God's order is not deceived, and so to live either longer or shorter than divine disposition has established is impossible, although it may be contingent that this man or that man die now or before if considered in himself. There are boundaries established beforehand for human life from some corporeal causes, for example, from constitution or something like that.

The life of man cannot extend beyond this, although it can be shortened because of some accidental cause. But the life of man can neither extend more nor less than the limits determined according to divine providence, under which everything falls.

But someone could object that, although man does not return after death to life, he does not still pass away perpetually because he still lives on in a sense in his sons. The words of Baldath seem to have spoken to this theme when he said, "This is the joy of its life, that others may be brought forth from the earth again." (8:19) But Job excludes this saying, "Whether his sons are noble or base, he will not understand." He means here: Man seizes eternal good by the intellect and so he also naturally desires it. The good however which is in the succession of sons cannot satisfy the intellectual appetite if man is totally consumed by death so that he does not exist perpetually.

A man does not comprehend the good in the succession of his sons either while he lives or after he dies if he completely ceases to exist through death. The intellectual appetite of man does not tend to the eternity of this good then, but to the good or evil which he has in himself and so he adds, "yet his flesh will suffer pain while he lives, his soul will grieve over him."

Here he distinguishes two pains. One is of the flesh in the apprehension of sense. The other is of the soul from the apprehension of the intellect or imagination which is properly called sorrow and here is termed grief.

END OF JOB CHAPTER 13

He then deduces the same things using reasons drawn from the properties of man. Man excels all lower creatures in two ways. One of these is operative power. For he truly is the lord of his own act by free will, which is proper to no other corporeal creature. Because of this, man is more powerful than every other corporeal creature. Therefore, he uses the others for his own sake. He also excels them in intellectual knowledge. Since he has a mind, yet this is somewhat indicated in his body especially in the face which man has and is very different from the other animals.

As a result of these two properties, it is apparent that man is not corrupted like other things so that they do not exist perpetually. He expresses the first of these properties saying, "Have you strengthened him a little to allow him to disappear forever?" He means: It is not fitting for you to strengthen man so much for a short time and in such a way that he would not exist perpetually afterwards. For it seems foolish for someone to make a very strong tool to use it for only a short time and then throw it away for good. The power of every corporeal creature is determined by finite effects while power of the free will is directed toward infinite actions.

This in itself bears witness to the power of the soul to make it endure infinitely. As to the second property he says, "will you change his face and let him go to waste?"

He means here: It is not fitting that you should make his face so different from the other animals and yet still dismiss him from this state of life forever never to return to life like the other animals. Intellectual knowledge is commonly perceived by the "face" because it is proper to the rational creature. Intellectual knowledge can only fittingly belong to an incorruptible substance, as the philosophers prove.

He also uses as a premise the expectation of the other life when he says, "Leave him a little while so that he might rest until the desired day comes like a hired man." Here it is necessary to observe that as the sun is the cause of day, so God is the author of life. When the sun leaves, the day ends and night comes. By God leaving, he understands the termination of the present life which man has from God. The present life, however, is filled with many tribulations, indeed he spoke about this when he said about man, "he is filled with many sorrows." (v.1) Since rest seems to be the end of toil, he calls death rest. So he says, "Leave him for a little while so that he might rest," i.e., take away the power by which you give life to man so that he can die. But the death of a man is not definitive, for he will be made whole again for life which does not die. Thus the state of human death, until whatever time resurrection is deferred, is brief in comparison to the state of future immortality, and so he clearly says, "for a little while." For God does not leave other things perish which will not return for a little while but for eternity, but he goes away from man for a short time, for man perishes in such a way that he will rise again.

He said above that the life of man on earth is like the day of the hired man, (7:1) desiring his payday. But the time of the repayment of man is not in this life, as was the opinion of the friends of Job, but in that life to which man is restored by resurrection. He then says, "that he might rest," that is, that he might die, yet not forever, but "until the day comes he desires," like the day of the hired man when he receives his pay is desired. Here Job for the first time makes clear his intention. For he does not deny that the present adversities are punishments, as though God did not reward or punish the acts of man, but maintains that the time of retribution is properly in the other life.

The Third Lesson: The Strength of the Tree and the Weakness of Man

7 If a tree is cut down, it has hope; it grows green again and its branches sprout. 8 If its roots age in the earth and its trunk has rotted in the dirt, 9 it will be rejuvenated by the mere scent of water, and it will put forth a shoot as when it was first planted. 10 Where, I ask you, is man when he has died, been stripped, and destroyed? 11 As the waters recede from the sea and the rivers dry up empty, 12 so when a man sleeps, he will not rise again; until heaven passes away, 13 he will not awaken nor will arise from his sleep.

After stating his opinion, Job here proceeds to make it clear. First, he shows that as things appear in this life man is in a worse condition than even those weak creatures which are renewed after their destruction. This fact is especially clear in trees. The life of the tree, like the life of a man, can fail in two ways, by violence or by nature. He speaks about the violent destruction of the tree, "If a tree is cut down, it has hope," the natural aptitude to renew its existence again because, "it grows green again," if it is replanted, "and its branches sprout." In this he demonstrates that it recovers the perfect life it formerly had. He expresses the natural failure of the tree saying, "If its roots age in the earth," when it cannot take in food because of some defect in natural power, and consequently, "its trunk has rotted in the dirt," because it is reduced to dust in some place by rot, "it will be rejuvenated by the mere scent of water," when the rain comes because the rottenness of the wood possesses a seminal potency. "And it will put forth a shoot," in a growth of leaves, "as when it was first planted." This is not found to be the case in man with the passing of the present life and so he then says, "Where, I ask you, is man when he has died, been stripped and destroyed?" Job posits there are three things which man loses by degrees. First, the soul is separated from the body, and he expresses this saying, "when he has died." Second, he loses his covering and decorations of the body, which remain for some time to someone who has died. But afterwards he is stripped of even these and so he says, "been stripped." Finally, even the very structure of his body is dissolved and expresses this saying, "and destroyed." After these things have been completed, no sensible appearance of man remains and so to those who believe in only the sensible and corporeal appearances of man he seems entirely reduced to nothing. To express the doubt of these people, Job then says, "Where, I ask you, is man?"

The Fifth Lesson: One cannot return from Sheol

18 A falling mountain is leveled, and the rock is displaced. 19 Water wears away stones and the earth is gradually consumed by flood. Will you destroy men in the same way? 20 Have you strengthened him a little to allow him to disappear forever? Will you change his face and let him go to waste? 21 Whether his sons are noble or base, he will not understand. 22 Yet his flesh will suffer grief while he lives, his soul will grieve over him.

After Job has posited his idea about the future resurrection, he here strengthens it with probable arguments. The first argument is taken from a comparison of man to lower creatures which are totally consumed without hope of restoration. For all things which are generated are subject to corruption and so even the mountains are dissolved by certain causes after the passage of some periods of time, although they seem very solid. He speaks to this theme saying, "A falling mountain is leveled." Rocks also are still dashed to pieces either by violence or by some natural cause, even though they seem very strong. He next speaks to this, "and the rock is displaced." Even stones are still worn away by water, although they seem very hard. He expresses this saying, "water wears away stones." The earth too is gradually changed in its disposition although it seems very stable and so he says, "The earth is gradually consumed by flood." But it would not be fitting to apply the same reasoning to the corruption of man and the corruption of these other things. So he concludes as though leading the argument to an unfitting conclusion, "Will you then destroy man in the same way?" He seems to say here: It is not fitting that men experience corruption like other corporeal creatures. For all the other creatures mentioned are completely corrupted and therefore they are not renewed the same in number. However, although man may be corrupted in body, he still remains incorrupt in soul which transcends the whole genus of corporeal things, and so the hope of restoration remains.

He excludes man being transformed in the state of the other life natural power saying, "You will call me and I will answer you," as if to say: The future transformation will proceed from the power of your voice or your command, as John says, "All those who are in the tombs will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear it will live." (5:28) Calling is characteristic of commanding, but answering is the obedience by which the creature obeys the Creator. Since the dead will rise not only according to the command of God to life, but also will be changed to some higher state by divine power, he then says, "You will stretch forth your right hand to the work of your hands," as if to say: The man who rises again will not be the work of nature, but of your power and you stretch forth your helping right hand to this work when he will be elevated to the glory of the new state by the help of your grace. Or his statement, "You will call and I will answer you," can be refer to the renewal of the body because he adds, "you will stretch forth your right hand to the work of your hands," to the soul which naturally desires to be united with the body to which God will stretch forth his right hand as a helper when the soul will attain by divine power what it cannot attain by his own power.

Now that he has posited his opinion about the resurrection of the dead, he returns to the subject of his wonder before at how much careful attention God gives to the works of man. He expressed this when he said, "You observed all my paths and considered the traces of my footsteps." (13:27) Here then he says, "You have numbered my steps," as if to say: Now it is no wonder if you so diligently examine the deeds of man since you reserve him for another life. Note however that divine providence considers human acts in two ways. First, in the fact that he examines and evaluates them. He clarifies this when he says, "you have numbered my steps." One numbers things which one cares about. Lest someone object that it is a mark for very great severity for God to examine the deeds of frail man with such great care, Job consequently emphasized the tendency of God to pardon us when he says, "but spare my sins." He means: although you number these things still I am filled with hope that you may spare me. Second, divine providence is attentive to human acts in that he preserves the good and wicked deeds of men in his memory to repay them with good or evil, and so he continues, "You have sealed my faults in a sack." for what one seals in a sack is carefully kept. Lest anyone say this sealing excludes divine mercy he then says, "But you cured my iniquity," as if to say: You layup punishments for sins in such a way that you nevertheless cure my faults by penance.

Note here that what does not perish totally can be renewed, as he has already said about wood which is cut down or is old. (vv. 7-9) But the renewal of something again when nothing remains seems impossible, for example, to renew water in the sea or a river which has completely evaporated. Man, however, as the text has already explained, seems to be so consumed by death that nothing remains of him, and so according to this argument it seems impossible that he is restored to life again. He expresses this theme saying, "As the waters recede from the sea and the rivers dry up empty, so when a man sleeps (when he has died), he will not rise again (from the dead)." Just as it seems impossible for incorruptible things to be corrupted, so it seems impossible for what is totally corrupted to be restored again. Heaven is incorruptible, and so he says, "until heaven passes away, he will not awaken," i.e. come to life again, "nor arise from his sleep," to do the works of the living again. He is saying in effect: As it is impossible for heaven to pass away, i.e. to be corrupted, so it is impossible for man to rise again from the dead. This is said, as we already established, in the supposition that nothing remains of man after death, according to his question, "Where, I ask you, is man." (v.10) One can also refer this to the opinion of those who posited that the whole corporeal universe should be corrupted and renewed again. In this reparation, they posited that the same men would return.

So the sense would be: While this world lasts, man will not rise again from the dead. The Catholic faith, however, does not submit that the substance of the world will perish, but only the state of this world as it now exists. Paul expresses this in 1 Corinthians, "The figure of this world is passing away." (7:31) Therefore this change in the figure of the world can be understood here by the wearing away of heaven. For the common resurrection of the dead at the end of the world is expected, as John says, "I know that I will again in the resurrection on the last day." (11:24)

The Fourth Lesson: Waiting for Darkness and Hope of Resurrection

13 continued Who will grant that you will protect me and hide me in Sheol until your anger passes and you will determine a time for me when you may remember me? 14 Do you think a dead man can live again? For all the days during which I have now struggled, I await the time when my transformation will come. 15 You will call me and I will answer you; you will stretch forth your right hand to the work of your hands. 16 You have numbered my steps, but spare my sins. 17 You have sealed my faults in a sack, but you cared for my iniquity.

After Job has shown what one can conclude about the resurrection of man from things which are apparent to the senses, he posits here his own opinion about the resurrection. It would be a horrendous and unhappy thing if man should so depart after death that he would never be brought back to life. This is because everything naturally desires its own existence. So Job shows his desire for the future resurrection saying, "Who will grant," even after death," that you will protect me in Sheol," i.e. you would preserve me with the special care with which you protect man, "until you anger passes," at the time of death. The death of man is caused by the removal of the divine action which conserves life, and so he said before, "Go away from him for a little." (v. 6) God seems angry with a man when he takes his gift of life away from him, especially for us who believe that death came from the sin of the first man. He explains how he wishes to be protected even in Sheol when he says, "and will you determine a time for me when you may remember me?" For God seems to have forgotten man when he takes the gift of life away from them. Then he remembers man when he leads him back to life. Therefore, to determine the time in which God remembers the dead man is nothing else than to determine the time of the resurrection. He very fittingly calls this "protection." (v.13) For when an artist, having dismantled his work, does not want to repair the building with the same material, like a house or something of the sort, he seems to have no care for the material of the house which is falling into ruin. But when he intends to repair the building from this material, he guards it diligently so that it does not perish. He calls this guardianship "protection."

After he has expressed his desire to rise again, he next asks if his desire could ever be realized at some future time for desires are sometimes for things which are also impossible. He then says, "Do you think a dead man can live again?" He shows what he himself thinks about this saying, "For all the days during which I have not struggled, I await the time when my transformation will come." We should note here that he had compared the life of man on earth to a soldier's (7:1) and to the days of a hired man in another place (7:6) because both soldiers and hired men await something after their present state. Therefore, just as he expressed that the state of the resurrection is like payday for the hired man, so he now shows the same concept using the metaphor of the soldier. Note that he does not await the desired end in any part of the present life, because he likens all the days of this life to the state of military life saying, "For all the days during which I have now struggled."

One should also note that man does not await another life like this one, because then that one would be like a warfare also. But he awaits a life in which he would not struggle like a soldier, but will triumph and reign. So he says, "I await the time when my transformation will come."

He means here: For my whole life I struggle like a soldier, changeable and subject to labors and anguish. But I wait to be transformed in the state of the other life which is without labors and anguish. The Apostle Paul expresses the same theme of transformation in 1 Corinthians when he says, "We shall all arise but we shall not all be changed." (15:51)