

Miracles in Haiti need human agents

As we face the terrible tragedy and devastation in Haiti, many of us have our faith tested. Where is God? How does God allow evil to happen? Atheists often point to experiences like this to dismiss faith in God altogether.

While I devoted my little book “When Life Doesn’t Make Sense” (Cathedral Foundation Press) to address this issue most fully, allow me to offer a few quick thoughts in this limited space.

The Bible offers various explanations to the problem of evil. The first is that, if evil happens, it must be our fault. Again and again, the prophets remind Israel that it was because of their sins that God brought evil upon them.

While it may be true that lying, stealing, addictions and so on, can indeed ruin our lives, it certainly is not true that the Haitians brought the earthquake upon themselves. Fault lines in the ocean floor are not the fault of the Haitians.

A second explanation for evil is that it’s the work of the devil. I think that’s true. In John’s Gospel, Jesus referred to Satan as a “murderer from the beginning.” Killing and maiming hundreds of thousands of people does indeed seem appropriate to the devil. Let’s give the devil his due.

What I always find amazing, however, is that when insurance companies don’t want to pay claims for natural disaster, they call them “acts of God.” I wonder what God insurance companies believe in? The God that was revealed in Jesus was pure goodness. Jesus didn’t blind people, make them mute, give them leprosy, paralyze them, or kill them. Jesus gave sight to the blind, speech to the mute, health to the paralyzed and lepers, life to the dead.

So, where is God in the midst of this tragedy? I think God is in two places.

First, God is the providential Father receiving the souls of the just into heaven. While God seems to grant the devil some limited power on earth, God has absolute

power in heaven. All the people that Jesus healed or raised from the dead in his earthly life would all still die. The miracle was only temporary. The miracle that lasts forever is eternal life. The worst tool of the devil is death, and God has defeated death and made tragedy a way to heaven. God, through the death and resurrection of Jesus, has turned defeat into victory.

So my first answer to where is God, is that God is the one who has conquered death, the one bringing eternal life to those who lost their mortal lives. Resurrection from the dead is the ultimate miracle.

The second place I believe God is, is in you and me. You and I are God at work in the world. At baptism we are born again into this divine life. In communion, we receive God so that we can become what we eat.

During World War II, a statue of Christ had its hands and arms blown off. A GI wrote at the base of the statue: "Now Christ has no hands but your hands, no arms but your arms."

The enormous outpouring of aid to Haiti is God working through humans. When St. Paul writes of the various gifts we all have, Paul is not just speaking of gifts we use for God. Rather he is speaking of our gifts as the way God gets into this world through us.

Let me close by using the famous Cana scene, where Jesus turns water into wine. First, Mary went to Jesus with the problem. Isn't that what we all do in prayer? We bring our needs to the Lord. Second, the servants did something - they filled the jars with water and took the water to the headwaiter. Jesus didn't just work a miracle. He worked a miracle using human agents. In the face of any tragedy, we are like Mary and the servants. When we combine faith, prayer, and service, we can indeed work miracles. Tragedy is defeated by love. And God is always where love is.