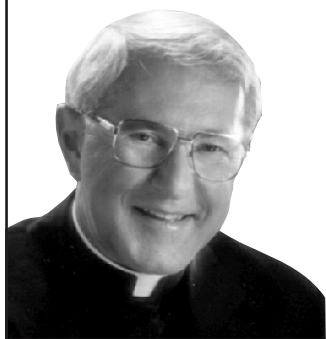


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Faith in the world of disasters

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The past two weeks have been filled with so much evidence of the tragic reality of the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. Snapshots from the lives of desperate people and the almost inconceivable damage across an area larger than the entire state of Wisconsin have filled our airwaves and papers. They have haunted our thoughts constantly, maybe even our dreams. For those poor people, life has suddenly become terrible. So much has been lost.

Only a few days earlier on a far lesser scale but closer to home the effects of the tornado at Stoughton also filled the media, perhaps with pictures of people we know personally.

Last Christmas it was the hor-

rible effects of the tsunami on the other side of the world, but brought into our very living rooms by the global communication of our modern world.

So many tragedies and no possible way of escaping their tears, even if we wanted to.

These things do not happen as divine punishment because of human sinfulness, no matter what an occasional television evangelist might suggest. The Book of Job made that abundantly clear! To those "friends" of Job who suggested that he must be a terrible secret sinner because of the tragedies which he suffered, God stated that "they did not speak correctly of me."

The collision of the major natural forces of this material world

cause terrible human sufferings. God sets the world in motion and remains mysteriously in the currents and forces of nature's physical power. God chooses normally not to intervene, no matter how much tragedy may remain in the wake of such disasters. God does not will the suffering, but only God can somehow bring good out of it all.

We can learn again of our utter dependence upon God and each other. It is a very frail world, and we are "in control" of very little. We can profit from a reminder of that reality.

Disasters of any kind become occasions for generous assistance out of our abundance to those in need.

Natural tragedies also give us an opportunity to review our priorities in life. Some material things are truly less important than we think.

The utter devastation of so much of our national economy offers an opportunity to rebuild the networks in a way which might be more just and compassionate at all times, not only in the wake of such disaster. Labor Day week can become a time to review the 1986 pastoral letter of the American bishops, "Economic Justice for all."

A wise person once said, "We are not punished for our sins, but rather by our sins." The decisions we make can have painful consequences; that may be why some decisions are in fact wrong. Actions can be morally wrong, not simply because they break a rule, but because they are inevitably harmful in the long run.

As columnists have pointed out recently, New Orleans and its environs along the Gulf coast have suffered because of the absence of national guards and resources now employed in Iraq. The protection of coastal wetlands has been cut back in an age of tight budgets. The federal allocations to the Army Corps of Engineers have been reduced, even for the needs of the Mississippi delta region. Some would say that these things are yet more tragic and completely unanticipated effects of the decision to enter a questionable war in Iraq. I leave those facts to the pondering of others.

Perhaps we don't need more words ... just silence to think of about the tragedy of Hurricane Katrina ... for everyone! God is in the midst of the chaos, trying to bring good out of the natural evil of it all. God may need some help from partners in the works of justice and generosity.