

I am of little account; what can I answer you? I put my hand over my mouth. Job 40:4

This Lenten Season began last Sunday with a biblical overture in which the devil aka Satan puts pressure on Jesus to become like the rest of men – hungry for fame and fortune. Satan has been so successful down through history in awakening such hunger that he wants to ward off Jesus from awakening another kind of hunger, namely for habits of generosity, solidarity, concern, faith, and grace that might transfigure the way we live.

As I was reading through this Gospel the name Satan lit up. It occurred to me that this character had been earlier mentioned in the Hebrew Bible's *Book of Job* which is all about *another temptation*, that of the faultless and prosperous patriarch Job. In that book – surprisingly – Satan is not a fellow in red underwear that lives in hell. *Satan is a member of God's presidential cabinet*; he attends meetings, plays a J. Edgar Hoover role, which is to spot sin and report it. When the Lord asks him to report what he has been doing, Satan replies: *I have been roaming the earth and patrolling it*. The Lord then asks: *Have you noticed my servant Job? . . . blameless and upright . . . avoiding evil?* Satan replies in effect: *No wonder, everything he touches turns to gold. Let me trip him up and you will discover how eloquently he will curse you*. The Lord says, *Give it a try*. And within no time Job loses everything, family, wealth, experiences a skin disease no dermatologist can relieve.

And Job wonders what's going on. He has been absolutely just – a good man – all his life. By heaven's standards he should prosper. Only sin merits such punishment. Friends gather to sympathize. In effect they say, *Job, you just have to admit that you were not as virtuous as you thought you were. That's why you are being punished*. But Job is adamant; he insists he has been just, good, honorable since his birth. His pain is unjustified. He demands a hearing, he is *that* confident about his worth, his virtue.

With Satan pulling the strings, Job's friends argue chapter after chapter: *Job you must have done something wrong, somehow. The Lord knows everything, more than you know; sins beyond your memory . . .* Here again Job holds fast: *Whatever the Lord knows, one thing I know, that I have been correct in everything I have done. I demand justice, a hearing, a trial*. [Remember this is a story.]

This goes on for thirty-seven chapters, a kind of “yes you did/no I didn't” match. And who should end their debate than the Lord finally speaking out of a storm to Job (and I would think to his accusers) saying: *Where were you when I founded the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. / Who determined its size? Surely you know? . . . / Into what were its pedestals sunk, and who laid the cornerstone, / While the morning stars sang together . . . / Who shut within doors the sea, . . . / Have you ever in your lifetime commanded the morning and shown the dawn its place / . . . Have you tied cords to the Pleiades, or loosened the bonds of Orion?* In effect Job (and his friends) are silenced by both the immensity and microscopic nature of Creation – that the universe is so much more than a courtroom – that awe may be the primary virtue we all should *share*. And there the curtain closes – but only to open for bows – and showing Job amid all that he had lost and *in all the land no other women were as beautiful as the daughters of Job*.