

OPENING WORDS & CHALICE LIGHTING

Can I see another's woe,
And not be in sorrow too?
Can I see another's grief,
And not seek for kind relief?
from a poem by William Blake

SILENT REFLECTION

CHECK-IN: (40-50 minutes)

FOCUS: “MISERY”

Bill Phillips, in our discussion about love, raised the question of how we deal with the misery in the world.

Bill's questions will shape our discussion. But, first, I've ferreted out a range of responses or attitudes people have about “misery.”

There's a little bit of the “blame the victim” in this comment of Martha Washington:
"The greater part of our happiness or misery depends on our dispositions and not our circumstances."

There's just a little question of “Why should I have escaped the misery others endure?”
in the next two comments.

Dennis Prager

"Given the amount of unjust suffering and unhappiness in the world, I am deeply grateful for, sometimes even perplexed by, how much misery I have been spared."

Lily Allen

"I think of myself as quite a confused kind of person, because I think there's so many great things about the world, but there are so many awful things too. I feel very guilty a lot of the time about enjoying my life so much when there are people living in such misery.

So we've gone from perplexity to guilt.

Grace Poe looks at the consequences of living in misery.

"I am deeply concerned about the impact of poverty on children because poverty can destroy their future and bind them to a life of misery.

As to attempts to really get the government involved in alleviating misery, Winston Churchill said:

"Socialism is a philosophy of failure, the creed of ignorance, and the gospel of envy, its inherent virtue is the equal sharing of misery."

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Taking up for government, Cesare Beccaria writes:

"In every human society, there is an effort continually tending to confer on one part the height of power and happiness, and to reduce the other to the extreme of weakness and misery. The intent of good laws is to oppose this effort and to diffuse their influence universally and equally.

Albert Schweitzer, who gave up a musical career to take his medical skills to establish a medical hospital in Lambarene in Gabon, Africa.

"Whoever is spared personal pain must feel himself called to help in diminishing the pain of others. We must all carry our share of the misery which lies upon the world.

We might also reflect upon the story of The Good Samaritan. An expert in the law, to test Jesus, asked what he had to do to inherit eternal life.

Jesus asked what was written in the law? The man answered: "“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

“You have answered correctly,” Jesus said.

The man persisted with a question we still wrestle with, hoping to narrow the field: “But who is my neighbor?” The story of the Good Samaritan followed.

DISCUSSION:

Let's turn now to Bill's questions:

He asked: “How do we, as compassionate and loving people, respond to misery in the world? What is our collective and individual response? Do we, should we, compartmentalize our personal lives? Will “the poor always be with us,” so we are absolved from guilt when we indulge ourselves? Should our government try to insure us against misery?” How should it address poverty, disaster, homelessness, unemployment, and disease?

LIKES AND WISHES

CLOSING WORDS:

What does love look like? It has the hands to help others. It has the feet to hasten to the poor and needy. It has eyes to see misery and want. It has the ears to hear the sighs and sorrows of men. That is what love looks like.

Saint Augustine