

Providence

Do not be anxious, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your Heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first his Kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well. ~ Matthew 6:31-35

THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD directs the course of history and each person's individual life. God's plan of loving goodness cannot fail and is realized by Christ in whom all "things in

Heaven and earth" are united and brought to perfection (see Eph 1:9-10). If we "seek first his Kingdom and his righteousness" (see beginning verses) and do his will, we will have all that we need and more besides.

In humility, the Psalmist cries: "O Lord, what is man that thou dost regard him, or the son of man that thou dost think of him? Man is like a breath, his days are like a passing shadow" (Ps 144:3-4). Yet God in his great love for his creatures provides for all our needs. He provides for not only our physical needs, but also more importantly our spiritual ones. Men and women are estranged from God because of sin. Sin has offended God and cut us off from his presence.

How do we solve the sin problem and get back to God? The answer is found in Scripture: "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (Rom 5:20). God takes care of sin through Jesus. He is our hope, and through the wonderful tool of repentance we have access to his grace and mercy.

"Then why does evil exist in the world created by God and sustained with his providence?"



The Massacre of the Innocents ordered by Herod, by Gustave Doré, 1855-1885

God's providence stretches backwards and forwards in time, breaking into the lives of every person in immediate and concrete ways: "If you sit down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet. Do not be afraid of sudden panic, or of the ruin of the wicked, when it comes; for the Lord will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being caught" (Prv 3:24-26). God provided for Abraham, who was moments from sacrificing his son, a ram to offer in his place. When the Israelites were enslaved by the Egyptians, God provided Moses who came and

led them to freedom, but that was not all. He took them to a mountain, blessed them with his law and made them his own Chosen People. With God there is always more: *“And so observe, from generation to generation, that none who put their trust in him will lack strength”* (1 Mc 2:61). Providence means that God does not only solve our problems (sin, slavery, etc.) but also watches over us constantly and provides in ways that we never could have expected. In the Old Testament, the image of a man setting out on a ship was used for God’s loving care: *“it is thy providence, O Father, that steers its course, because thou hast given it a path in the sea, and a safe way through the waves, showing that thou canst save from every danger”* (Wis 14:3-4).

As we gain more experience recognizing God’s providence in our lives, it becomes clearer and richer. Because of the Father’s providential care, Jesus calls us to a childlike abandonment to him. Trusting in his providence does not mean being irresponsible or careless with one’s duties and the gifts he has already given. At the same time, it does not mean being worried or anxious about them either. God is immanent (near) and his providence is a sign of the loving goodness he has in store for us: *“The works of the Lord are all good, and he will supply every need in its hour”* (Sir 39:33; see also Na 1:7). He is our hope; there is no reason to be hopeless or afraid about any of the trials

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Daniel in the Lions' Den, by Gustave Doré, 1855-1885

that come our way in life. *“Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the Kingdom”* (Lk 12:32).

God gives us the opportunity to share in the work of providence through our prayers. Christians pray for themselves, their families, friends, neighbors, strangers and even their enemies. The most important thing we can say about it is, “Prayer works.” We don’t say our prayers hoping they will work. The Father is there and, as Jesus says, he knows our needs even before we ask him (see Mt 6:8). Perseverance and patience are two important virtues that help us to pray and keep praying. Prayer is important and very much a part of God’s providential work.

Then why does evil exist in the world created by God and sustained with his providence? The answer lies in the mystery of human freedom. Evil is the price God decided to pay in giving us freedom. Evil does not present any real threat to his power or authority. God knows how to deal with evil. In reality, evil is neither essential nor definitive, and as the *Catechism* explains, *“[t]here is not a single aspect of the Christian message that is not in part an answer to the question of evil”* (CCC 309; italics in original). As members of the Body of Christ, and co-workers with God in providence, we have nothing to fear and should *“run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith”* (Heb 12:1-2).

(CCC 302-314, 2635, 2659, 2828-2830, 2834)