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As the end of the liturgical year comes into sight, issues surrounding the end times are starting to come into focus. This week, we find James and John asking for their places in the kingdom of glory. I suppose we would all like to know that we have a good seat reserved in the kingdom, but what the disciples and we learn in today's Gospel is that the cost of the kingdom is to be bound to the whole life of Christ, not just the good times, the miracles, the powerful moments of preaching, the wonderful meals. In case we miss the point, the first reading is happy to remind us of this - "the LORD was pleased to crush him with infirmity" - pretty clear.

The other side of the coin of the question of suffering is in the second reading. It is not only that we should not expect to enter paradise without offering all of our lives, good times and bad, as part of the body of Christ, it is also that we cannot suggest that Jesus doesn't understand. In the doctrine of the two natures of Christ, we are taught that he was fully human. There was no special dispensation, Christ was not superman, Christ became a true fellow citizen and suffered as bad as it gets. God believes in us, and sent Christ to show that belief. For Christ it was not only the physical suffering, but also the disappointment that mankind chose the darkness that must have made his suffering unlike any suffering we have seen. None of our sufferings can top that, and so there is no pain born of our service that we cannot bring to the Lord. That is why we can endure. Welcome to the road to the kingdom.

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