



PETER MCVERRY SJ, a leading campaigner for the homeless, asks 'Where is God in suffering?' and shares how this age-old question still challenges him.

WHERE IS GOD?



A refugee from Syria is given help after being brought ashore by a volunteer lifeguard. A refugee boat and Turkey can be seen in the background. Photo: Malcolm Chapman / Shutterstock

There is so much suffering in our world. We see some of that suffering every day on our television screens in Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, South Sudan, Yemen – the list goes on and on. Most of that suffering remains hidden from our sight, pain silently borne by millions of people. And many people rightly ask, 'Where, in all this suffering, is God? Why does God not act?' And the conclusion that many come to is, 'There is no God.'

In every person's life, there is pain and suffering. All of us suffer the pain of bereavement, losing

someone close to us and leaving a pain in our hearts that may never heal. Others have so much more suffering imposed on them, broken relationships, loneliness, depression. They too rightly ask, 'Where is God? Why does God not act?' And sometimes they too conclude that God does not exist.

But the question itself is based on a false understanding of who God is.

In Ireland, we expect our Taoiseach to address problems such as homelessness, poverty and unemployment. That is his role and responsibility, and we rightly demand

that he act to solve those problems. If he does not, or cannot, we hold him accountable.

And in the UK, people expect their Prime Minister to solve problems such as tower blocks that put peoples' lives at risk, or child poverty or homelessness. That is her responsibility and people will rightly criticise her if she does not act.

And in the world, where wars and famine exist, we expect the Secretary General of the United Nations to address these problems and try to resolve them. That is his role in world affairs, and we rightly criticise him if he fails to intervene.

But God is not just another world leader, a bigger and more powerful version of Leo Varadker, or Theresa May, or António Guterres, whom we can, rightly, call on to solve the world's problems. That is not the nature of who God is.

God is love, and therefore God is the source of all the love that exists in our world. In the midst of the wars in Syria, Yemen and elsewhere, there are countless acts of love taking place. Doctors from Médecins Sans Frontières place their own lives in danger to bring relief to the injured; the Irish navy patrol the

Mediterranean to rescue migrants in danger of drowning, and many millions of people spend their lives bringing aid and support to those without food, medicine or shelter. The love that drives them, and which they show to those they serve, is God working in our world. In all acts of love, including the numerous and hidden acts of neighbours everywhere, God is at work.

And when we experience suffering in our own personal lives, family, friends and neighbours reach out to us to try and console us and, if possible, to take away some of the pain. In their loving and caring, God is at work.

Where there is love, there God is present and active and working in our world. God is often most active in the midst of suffering and pain because it is there we find many acts of love and caring.

The responsibility then is given to each of us to be the presence of God to those in pain, to be God's response to the suffering around us. If we do not act, then we cannot blame God.

The question then is not, 'In the midst of all this pain and suffering, where is God?' but, 'In the midst of all this pain and suffering, where am I?' 



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