

Easter 7 / May 21, 2023

1 Peter 4:19

“Therefore, let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.”

Entrusting ourselves to God’s care in suffering

The seventh Sunday is the last Sunday of the Easter season. Thursday was the 40th day of His resurrection and the commemoration of His bodily ascension into the heavens and presence at the right hand of the Father. Jesus, Son of God from eternity and Son of Mary in time, shares fully in the glory and power of the Father. The time between the Ascension and the Sunday of Pentecost, the 50th day of Jesus’ resurrection, was a period of waiting, reflection and prayer for the apostles and followers of Jesus. In those days the apostles chose a successor to Judas, Matthias. The believers remained in Jerusalem waiting to be clothed with power from on high, in obedience to Jesus’ words.

Something big was going to happen. Something big had happened. Jesus rose from the grave the first-fruits of those who believe. They had seen Him multiple times over forty days. They wondered when they would see Him again. As they watched Him ascend into the sky the angels said, “This Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw Him go into heaven.” They wondered how long they would wait before He returned and what would happen before that glorious day.

Jesus said, they would be His witnesses. He warned them they would suffer because of their faith and witness to Him,. He said, “If they hated me they will hate you too.” He would remove His bodily presence, but He was not leaving them alone. He would remain with them through His Spirit. The Spirit would remind them of the things He had said. The Spirit would enlighten their minds to understand everything the scriptures said about Him. The Spirit would abide in them individually through the word and washing of Holy Baptism. Jesus would be with them in a special way, when as few as two of them were gathered in His name to worship, pray and share fellowship.

Jesus withdrew His physical presence from the Church with His ascension, but He has not left us. He surrounds us with His presence. He fills us with His Spirit. He is as close as a prayer. He speaks to us in His word. He refreshes our faith and renews our spirits in the forgiveness of sin, by the water of baptism into His death and resurrection. He nourishes our souls with His righteousness in the bread and wine of Holy communion, a participation in His body and blood. We see Him in the faces of fellow believers. He speaks words of encouragement through the voice of the church. He supports us in our griefs and shares in our gladness through the body of believers and our fellowship together. He blesses us with the responsibility of witnessing to His love. He empowers us to share the promise of forgiveness and to proclaim the gift of eternal life; offered for all to receive through faith in His name, given freely to all who believe in Him as God and Saviour.

Peter wrote the verses of our text many years after Jesus’ death, resurrection and ascension. During that time, He experienced the truth of Jesus’ words in the hated he experienced. First at the hands of the religious leaders of Israel. Later by the pagan Gentiles and their kings. Finally, he suffered death at the hands of the Roman emperor, who had him crucified in a way similar to his Lord. In all things Peter experienced Jesus’ continuing presence in the word, the sacraments and the fellowship of believers. In and through these, Peter was strengthened in suffering and encouraged in his faith in Christ Jesus. As he said in our text, he entrusted himself into the hands of his faithful Creator and continued to do good, by proclaiming God’s love and salvation through faith in Jesus’ name. Peter reminds us that as believers we also share in Christ’s afflictions, and that when we experience unjust suffering, because of faith in His name and obedience to His word, we too need to entrust ourselves to God’s care while continuing to do good.

We should not suffer as breakers of the moral law, reflected in just laws of the land. He says, “But let none of you suffer as a murderer or as a thief or an evildoer, or as a meddler.” On the other hand, we should be prepared to endure suffering when unjust laws command us to disobey God’s commands. He says, “If anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.” Peter shared in Christ’s sufferings, enduring unjust treatment and finally death, because of His faith in Christ and in this gave witness to salvation through faith in His name. Being conscious of God’s presence, He received strength and encouragement in faith; not only to endure, but also to rejoice in the things He suffered for the sake of Christ and the gospel of salvation

through faith in Him. Peter is speaking from faith affirmed by experience, when he calls us to entrust our souls to a faithful Creator while continuing to do good. We cast our cares upon Him knowing He loves us!

We know God loves us because He gave Jesus to live with, die and rise for us. We know God loves us, not because He gives us pleasant lives and good times. We know God loves us because He gave Jesus to join us in all the pain, suffering and unpleasantness of life in this world in bondage to sin, enthralled by the devil and under the condemnation of death. Long before Peter counselled others who suffer according to God's will to entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good, Jesus entrusted Himself to His heavenly Father for the good of our salvation. Jesus the eternal Son of God, limited Himself by taking on our humanity and living under the constraints of time. He joined us in a life where time frames our existence. The sands of time ran down for Him as they do for us. Although free from sin in His being, Jesus experienced life in a world in bondage to sin. In a world where every life concludes with death, Jesus experienced the deaths of loved ones. Death came to Him as it comes to us and every human soul.

Jesus loves us, but unlike any other human being, helpless in the presence of sin, death and the devil, He is able to help us in time and eternity. He died for our salvation. Death came to Him, but He came for death. By His sinless life, holy, innocent suffering and sacrificial death, He took away the guilt of the sin of the world. His death took the bite out of death. Christ disarmed the devil. The devil has no control over those who believe and receive Christ in their hearts as God and Saviour. Peter did not stand alone in the face of suffering and death. Peter stood in Christ. We do not stand alone either. We stand in Christ and Christ stands for us. He stands with us as a rock and anchor in all the bad experiences of life, suffering and death. We stand in Him, by humbling ourselves under God's mighty hand, accepting His will, even if it is unpleasant and painful; knowing that in His time He will exalt us in the resurrection of Christ. We stand in Him, by standing on His word when approached by the temptations of the devil and the world. We stand in Him, casting our anxieties upon Him, knowing that He loves us.

Peter calls us to stand firm in our faith, "knowing that the same kind of sufferings are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world." Christians have always suffered for the sake of their faith in Christ, sometimes even at the hands of those who professed to be Christians. We remember the suffering church in our prayers. We remember the church prays for us in our sufferings. The apostles remind us that the pleasures and pains of this life are temporary and pass away in time. God's blessings are eternal.

St. John wrote, "The world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever." Suffering passes away in time. God's love in Christ is eternal. Peter says, "And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself restore, confirm, strengthen and establish you." We entrust our souls to God in all things in life and in the presence of death, knowing He loves us and has eternal blessings in store for us in the resurrection of Christ Jesus. To God be the glory! In Jesus' Name. Amen