

Rogate, the Sixth Sunday of Easter
May 5, 2024

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Minneapolis, Minnesota

+ Jesu juva +

PEACE AMID TRIBULATION

John 16:23-30, I Timothy 2:1-7

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

Nou've heard it before from well-intentioned friends, from little religious memes posted by some relative, from self-help authors and from popular preachers: "If you just have faith, everything will be alright." Its a nice sentiment. But it isn't what you experience. Being a Christian, trusting in Christ, does not mean your life in this world will all go smoothly. And when you hear people saying, "just have a little more faith," it can make you feel like you really aren't a very good Christian. Anxieties about your life, bouts of depression or sadness, grief, persecution from others, must all be signs of your having a very weak faith. That's the implication, isn't it? And you say to yourself, "if I just had a little stronger faith, then I wouldn't suffer what I am suffering from." And you begin to feel despair.

But suffering is not contrary to faith. And, (though we do have the promise that there will be no more suffering in heaven) living this life as a Christian does not result in all suffering being removed from you. Quite the contrary, Jesus says today: "In the world you will have tribulation." Being a Christian doesn't mean that your troubles will all disappear. It means that they will increase in this world! For you are not of the world, so what peace can you find in it. Instead you will find the world troublesome and the world will trouble you. Being a Christian also does not mean that God will remove from you the other sorts of troubles and difficulties and tragedies that take place in this fallen world. If you think that having faith will make the difficult things go away, you will end up in despair. The Christian's peace, as Jesus tells us this morning, is not in the world, not in having a trouble-free life, but in Him. "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

While suffering and tribulation is not contrary to the faith, despair is. And that is because to despair is the emotion one feels when one has been abandoned by God. It is not that Christians never feel that way. Its is even expressed in the Psalms, as for example in Psalm 77 where the Asaph cries out: "Will the Lord cast off forever? And will He be favorable no more? Has His mercy ceased forever? Has His promise failed forevermore? Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has He

in anger shut up His tender mercies?" So it is not that we don't ever feel that God has removed Himself, we sometimes do, even though He has not.

But what are you to do at such times? Asaph says: "And I said, 'This is my anguish; but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High.' I will remember the works of the Lord; surely I will remember Your wonders of old. I will also meditate on all Your work, And talk of Your deeds." Note the three things Asaph does. First he remembers. He calls to mind again the way that the Lord has upheld him in the past. Remembering takes you away from the emotions of the present and anchors your thoughts in something firm, something that has happened. Now sometimes remembering can be a harmful thing, such as remembering sins or failures or trauma that has already been forgiven and is in the past. But when it comes to remembering God's actions toward us, it is a very good thing to remember. We remember that He has baptized us and made us His own children. We remember that He has promised to dwell with us and in us and to bless us! Second, Asaph calls to mind the miraculous things the Lord has done in the past. For the Psalmist this probably meant things like the Exodus and the bringing of the nation into the Promised Land and such wonders. For us this means not just miracles that God has done, but especially His incarnation, that is, His having become one of us, and His having saved us from death and hell us by His glorious resurrection from the dead which we celebrate this holy season. Third, Asaph meditates on the works and deeds of God. He doesn't just remember them, he fills his mind with them by reading and hearing the Word of God, by pondering all that God has done, and by giving thanks to Him for these things. These are three that we should also do when we feel despair coming upon us: remember what God has done, call to mind our salvation, meditate on His Word and His deeds.

Today we are reminded of a fourth thing, the thing that these three bring us to: Rogate! That is, Pray! Even, and perhaps, especially when you feel that God will not listen, that He is not there or has closed His ears to you, pray. Again the Psalmist instruct us in the same Psalm: "I cried out to God with my voice— To God with my voice; and He gave ear to me." and in another place: "Awake! Why do You sleep, O Lord? Arise! Do not cast us off forever. Why do You hide Your face... Arise for our help, and redeem us for Your mercies' sake."

And today we hear the promise from our Savior that, even though our faith be struggling or though it be weak, our Father in Heaven will hear us and will not abandon us. "And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full." Because you are in Christ, that is, because you have been baptized in His Name, because trusting His Word you continue in His name, because you are in the Faith, when you ask those things that faith rightly seeks, those things that you seek as one who lives in His name, our Father will give them to you.

And what is it that faith seeks? It seeks Jesus and His righteousness. It asks for the forgiveness of one's sins. And when you ask, confessing those sins, absolution is given. Faith asks for grace to believe and trust as it ought, and when you turn again to the Word, grace is given and the Holy Spirit strengthens you. Faith seeks the presence of Jesus who although He has left the world and gone to the Father, has also promised that when we are gathered in His Name, that is gathered as Christians to receive Him in His Word and in His Supper, that He will be present with us. And He is! Faith seeks these things not just for one's own self, but for one's brothers and sisters in Christ and intercedes for them. Faith seeks that the Gospel go forth into the world and that others hear of Christ. And it does go forth. Faith prays, "for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence." And the world is upheld by Christ in love and mercy.

But there will, of course, be times when God does not answer your prayers as you would like Him to do. As you've already heard, He does not always remove suffering from you. He does not always heal your body or the bodies of those for whom you pray. He does not always remove the temptations the world places before you and He does not always stop the works of your enemies. Nicholas of Lyra, a man whose commentaries on Scripture were standard reading in the time of Luther, said that sometimes God denies our requests for our own good, or for the good of others. And sometimes He denies our requests in order that judgment may be heaped upon our enemies and their guilt increase before Him. You, however, are called to find peace not in your situation in life, but in Christ. You are to find your victory not in the temporal demise of your enemies, but in Jesus who has overcome the world.

This Easter season we celebrate the fact that His victory has become our victory. His resurrection and ascension will lead to our own resurrections and ascensions. We look with faith to that great day, believing the promises of our Savior who has proven Himself true. But while we await that heavenly peace which He will certainly bestow, we receive already now a part in the heavenly and partake of a foretaste of that peace. It is here when we are gathered as His Church. It is bestowed in the Gospel proclaimed, in your sins forgiven for Jesus's sake, in His righteousness bestowed on you who have been unrighteous. This is why the sermon always closes with a declaration of peace to you, the peace of God which passes all understanding, etc.

That peace is declared again at the Holy Supper, as the Body and Blood of Christ are put before your eyes and I chant the words, "The peace of the Lord be with you always." And then that peace is given to you as you receive the Lord's body and blood into your mouths, and are united with Him and enlivened by Him. Here are you partake of heavenly things, and heavenly blessings are laid upon you even now as you move through this world with all of its ups and downs and

troubles, and illnesses, and tribulations and its griefs. Here you may be of good cheer and sing in thanksgiving to your Savior, for He has overcome the world. And in Him, even when you can't feel it, even when you have been tempted to doubt it, you overcome the world! So let us sing in joy even as we pray in faith, knowing that God hears us. In the words of another Psalm which we chanted in the Introit: "Blessed be God, who has not turned away my prayer, nor His mercy from me!" To Him, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be all thanks and praise now and forever. Amen.

+ Soli Deo gloria +