

SUFFERING FOR GOOD: GRACE ALONGSIDE GOD

Christ is Risen!

Hear again the Word of God for this fourth Sunday in the season of the Resurrection of our Lord:

But if you, doing good and continue suffering, patiently endure, this is grace alongside God.¹

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

This Sunday's ancient order of readings points the believer, you who confess Christ-crucified for the forgiveness of all your sins, to the sure and certain hope that the central message of Holy Scripture declares. To the world, that which you have heard declared again today – that Jesus would suffer and die, and His disciples sorrow; and that Jesus would rise from the dead, and His disciples would rejoice -- to the fallen world -- those without the Faith – that is a mystery, unbelievable, unreal. You, dear Christians, bought with the blood of Christ, you are special! For, in Christ you know and believe that when you suffer for doing good (as all people sometimes do), that when you sorrow because the world treats you shamefully for working good, you are actually free to discover yourself under God's grace! Think of that in this way: Christ suffered unto death for doing good to all men; thus when you suffer in Christ for doing good, He is participating with you, His nail scarred hands bearing you up. After all, St. Peter still proclaims:

But if you, doing good and continue suffering, patiently endure, this is grace with God.²

¹ I Peter 2:19.

² I Peter 2:19.

In our society, we have a saying, “no good deed goes unpunished.” That cynical saying appears to have been around since the beginning of the 20th century. We today have never lived when that statement has not been held to be a universal truth. “No good deed goes unpunished,” teaches that, “life is so unfair that one is more likely to get into some sort of trouble than be rewarded if one attempts to do a good deed.”³ Since that is all part of popular wisdom, does that mean it is true? And does that statement about good deeds actually express that which God, through St. Peter, is declaring about living the Christian life?

The answer to the first question is: “sometimes it seems true that no good deed goes unpunished.” The answer to the second question is a resounding, “no.” The Apostle is not teaching that, whenever you do good, that is, “good before man which is true Good alongside God – that which is done in the Faith,” you will suffer, sorrow, and be rejected by your fellow humans. Rather, Peter is declaring that which might, and sometimes does, happen. (That is proclaimed so that, if you are not currently suffering, sorrowing, or lamenting because you are suffering for doing good, you do not think you are actually not right with God. (Over the years, I have learned how some of us think!)). Hear the enduring truth, not the popular saying, again:

*But if you, doing good and continue suffering, patiently endure, this is grace alongside God.*⁴

³ Titelman, Gregory. *Random House Dictionary of Popular Proverbs and Sayings*, New York: Random House Publishing, 1996. Internet: http://www.phrases.org.uk/bulletin_board/27/messages/317.html, accessed April 29, 2012.

⁴ *I Peter* 2:19.

We are in the midst of the season of the Resurrection of our Lord. We have the joyful declaration of His resurrection from the dead proclaimed, and we respond with joy and happiness. That is good, but joy with happiness is not the sum and substance of the Christian life after Christ's resurrection. Joy is always there, for the truth is that Christ has conquered death, and the devil, and the world for us. But, joy is not a reality which is always felt by those who confess and believe in Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection on their behalf. In fact, joy may underlie suffering, sorrow, sadness, and pain in the Christian's life. Joy is revealed in knowing that our ultimate enemies are vanquished, even while we experience the pain of their dying attacks against us. True Joy comes with knowing and believing that we Christians have sure and certain hope in the Lord's $\pi\sigma\tau$ (His mercy, loving-kindness, grace, and so much more). In essence, St. Peter's words about the Christian's having grace alongside God while patiently enduring, suffering for doing good, are given to those, we, who have already received God's mercy, loving-kindness, and grace now and forever. They are given to those who see - in the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus - our own suffering, death, and resurrection. The Word of God declares that the Christian who suffers in this life for doing good, is suffering no more than our Lord who suffered far more than we for doing the ultimate Good. These words are for your encouragement, given to lift you up in times of trial for doing right before your fellow humans, and thus before God:

*But if you, doing good and continue suffering, patiently endure, this is grace alongside God.*⁵

As you are aware, those words follow a lot of other encouraging thoughts.

They may serve as a summary of that which has been declared before. The Lord's encouragement regarding the Christians' doing good, suffering, and patiently enduring conclude teaching which begins with this phrase:

*O beloved ones, I beseech (you) as aliens and sojourners: continue to hold away from the fleshly strong desires, which continue to wage war against the soul; the manner of life of all of you in the nations continually having good, so that, when they continue to speak against all of you as evil-doers, from the good works continually viewing carefully, they may have glorified God in (a) day of visitation.*⁶

St. Peter begins by addressing the congregation as those who are his beloved ones. That is, those who hear these words in the Faith are more than just acquaintances of the Apostles. You, we, are the beloved in the Lord, for whom He came into the flesh as Perfect Man, a true foreigner and alien among those who were covered in sin. For a time, God was a traveler through our land, fully Human, yet without sin. For our sakes, He became sin for us. He came, suffering for God, that we might have grace alongside God.

Another reality which St. Peter declares in the opening words of today's reading, is that which is the true description of the Christian life. That is, we who have been saved by grace, through the Faith of Jesus the Christ, still are tempted to sin, and actually fall into sin, often. Some traditions which claim to be Christian call that reality,

⁵ 1 Peter 2:19.

⁶ 1 Peter 2:11-12.

“backsliding.” Yet, the Christian’s biblically defined nature as “sinner/saint” means that, while our sins are forgiven, we do not “slide” back into sin. The Apostle, in effect, declares that no saint is wholly pure and perfect in this mortal life. Rather, we war against sin, in ourselves, in our world, and in the spiritual realms, daily. In fact, it is not your continual “backsliding” which brings you in danger of losing the salvation, forgiveness, and life which Jesus suffered and died to bring to you; it is the temptation to think that you are completely good which can lead you to fall fully from grace. In fact, if you find yourself tempted by strong fleshly desires, those thoughts, things, and people which entice you to break any one, and thus all, of these commandments and their meanings, then you have proof that you are Christian!

The unbeliever, with regards to true good, cannot be tempted to sin, he or she is sin. Sin, and sinfulness, and the propensity to sin, is an inherited condition. It is a disease before God in this fallen creation. Therefore, those who continue to reject the grace of God in His Son’s sin-bearing for them, from the moment of their human conception, are sin, and can do no true good before God and their fellow humans. Why, they, and you before the Word came to you to save you from sin and all its effects, can only be tempted to good! Yet having not the power of good, God’s good, in themselves, they cannot fall forward into true good.

Thank God, you, dear Christian, have been freed to do God’s good. That is those words and deeds which, when those who are not freed for good see your works and deeds, they will be brought to shame. Deeds that show forth true saving faith –

hope in the midst of trials and so forth – remain a powerful witness to those who are trapped in sin, who have been bound by unbelief into their sins.

St. Peter gives illustrations from daily life how the Christian's good-doing can show forth hope to those who are lost. He begins with calling those of the Faith to remain subject to humanly created order. The Christian is free to follow, and honor those who rule over us, be it in the realm of civil government, the household, or the workplace. That is a tough teaching in our day, among we who have a representative form of government. Yet, when a ruling authority does not command against the Christian conscience, the Christian is freely-bound to follow his or her leader, as if to God.

God is the God of order, and He has, in His infinite wisdom, instituted human government, rule and authority to restrain evil in this world. Rulers are God's means to punish evil-doers – even when the rulers are not of the Faith. Human rulers also are given to commend those who do civil good: they are not a terror to those who follow their just laws. This, the Christian is freed to do because you have been given the gift of the Faith.

Faith receives from God and His love then works through us to those around us. It is out of that which we receive from God that we are free to honor all people. It is from the Faith of God, which we continue to receive from God through His chosen means, that we are freed to sacrificially love – to endure all, to suffer with one another in our failings, and when we are persecuted for doing good. And that, in our representative

government, means voting for those who hold positions which do not violate the Christian conscience as described, prescribed, and circumscribed by the Word of God. It means taking our stand for those who cannot speak God's Good for themselves – from the pre-born to the elderly. Bearing under suffering for doing good means to call leaders, even those who are without the Faith, to uphold that which is right, just, and fair according to God's Word (in this we use Natural Law defenses, as those who do not have God's Word in their hearts cannot be held to it by us (another discussion for another time)). In so doing, we will remain under God's grace, even as we may suffer for not being politically correct, or unwilling to speak the entire truth in love, to honor those who have no honor before God, that some might hear, believe, and be saved as we have been and continue to be. Christ is risen!

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Resurrection IV (*LSB One-year series*)

Lamentations 3:22-33; I Peter 2:11-20; John 16:16-22

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All of you have remained in subjection to every human creation on account of (the) Lord, whether to (a) king as continually supreme, whether to (a) governor as through him being continually sent for legal punishment for evil-doers and for praise of good-doers; because this remains the will of God – continually doing good you may continue to muzzle the ignorance of foolish men – as free men and not as veiled men, having the evil for the freedom, but as of God slaves. All of you honor all (people), the brotherhood continue to love, God continue to fear, the king honor.

The household servants, you continue to be submissive in all fear to the masters, of whom alone to the good ones and mild ones, but also to the hard ones. For this remains grace, if on account of conscience of God you continue to bear under some sorrow you continue to suffer unjustly. For what sort of reputation (will you have) if you continue serving and you continue to be beat (and) you patiently endure? But if you, doing good and continue suffering, patiently endure, this is grace alongside God.