

Romans 8:18-25
8th Sunday after Pentecost
August 7, 2011
Pastor Joel T. Sauer
Year A

Hope for Suffering Christians.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son † and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Scripture's lesson for our meditation this morning is taken from the St. Paul's letter to the congregation at Rome, chapter 8, beginning at the 18th verse. Permit me to read to you verse 18 again:

¹⁸ I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

This is the Word of God!

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ!

Have someone ever said to you, "Just be positive!" as you were going through a troubling time. I remember going through an extremely painful time and a friend said to me, "Just be positive! Stop looking at the negative!" I know that he meant well, but that really didn't give me any help or comfort.

Often times, when we go through rough times, it is hard to find comfort or peace, right? What we need at those times is hope – hope that keeps us going, hope that the troubles will not last, hope that enables us to endure those hard times.

In the lesson before us this morning, God, through the pen of St. Paul, gives us such a hope, a hope for suffering Christians. It is a hope that tells us our sufferings will not last and it is hope that points us to what lays ahead. With that in mind, let's take a look at our lesson and may the Holy Spirit bless our study of His Word giving us comfort, peace, and, yes, hope, in this sin-filled world. Let's go to our lesson.

St. Paul starts out this lesson and writes, "**I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.**"

St. Paul knew all about suffering, pain, and sorrow. Throughout his life he suffered physically and mentally. He was stoned and left for dead. He often went without food and drink. He was afflicted and tormented with what he called, "**a thorn in his flesh.**" (2 Cor. 12:7) He went through many nights where he struggled against his sinful nature. St. Paul was no stranger to physical and mental suffering.

And yet, he says, none of these things can compare to the glory which would be revealed in those who are God's children. Is St. Paul simply dismissing the suffering we all go through? Not at all, but he puts suffering in perspective. Look at what he says in verses 19-21.

“The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.”

When we look around us at the world today, we see suffering. We see creation, the animals, the very earth, suffering and going through things for which it was not made. Was the world made to produce destructive hurricanes like hurricanes and tornados? No. Were the animals made to prey on each other? No. Were human beings made to die, to suffer? Not at all. The suffering and death of this world were not part of God’s perfect creation at the beginning.

But ever since Adam and Eve took that bite of the fruit, all creation was subject to frustration – frustration because this sin-filled world was not what was to be!

And so creation waits eagerly for the time when, as St. Paul says, the sons of God will be revealed. Creation is waiting eagerly, like a child straining his neck to see that just out of his sight, the time when there will be no more decay, no more sin. But until that time, it groans in suffering.

We also groan do we not? We groan when we suffer pain – physical or mental. We groan when we suffer trouble. We groan when we suffer disease. We groan when we see that our bodies, as they get older, are not able to do the things they once did.

None of us here wants to suffer and yet not a day goes by when we don’t face a hardship, be it ever so small. Why? St. Paul tells us – it is because we live in a sin-filled world. Once we were born, we were in bondage to decay. We were born to die, because we inherited that sinful nature from our first parents.

But there is hope! Hope because of Jesus! Jesus, the Son of God, descended into this sin-filled world. He suffered – oh, how He suffered. Just read through the Holy Gospels and you will see Jesus being abandoned by His followers. You will see Jesus suffering physical and mental pain. You will see Jesus suffering the greatest pain of all – the wrath of God over sin, our sin! Jesus came into this world to suffer and to die in order that we may have hope! Through His life and death forgiveness of sins is ours. Through His life and death heaven is ours - the sufferings of this world, our sufferings, will not last!

Did you notice how St. Paul, in verse 18, described the sufferings that we all go through? He calls them, “**present sufferings.**” Our sufferings on this earth will not last!! They will pass away as quickly as the present passes away to the future and we eagerly look forward to what lays ahead!

As most of you know, I am the youngest of nine children. Having three children of my own, I often wonder how Mom and Dad were able to keep their sanity with nine children running around and destroying the house! But what really amazes me is this – how could Mom go through the pain of childbirth 9 times! I will never understand that pain, but I have seen it. Why would women, again and again, want to even go through that pain?

You know the answer. Like my Mom, mothers do not look at the pain, but what comes after the pain – that beautiful little baby – that gift of God. As soon as the baby is born, the pain is put aside. As soon as the baby is born – a mother will say, like St. Paul, the suffering wasn’t even worth comparing to the joy of holding that newborn in her arms.

What is true with the pains of childbirth is also true for you and me as we suffer in this world. The sufferings we presently suffer; despair, pain, illness, trouble is nothing

compared to what awaits us, to what Christ has won for us by His life, by His death, by His resurrection.

How can we be so sure? How can we be so sure that our present sufferings will pass away? How can we be so sure that glory in heaven is what awaits us? St. Paul writes in verse 23 - **“...we ourselves, ... have the firstfruits of the Spirit...”**

What does this mean? Back in the OT, the people would take the first part of the harvest and give it to God. This was like a deposit on what was to come – the firstfruits were a symbol that the rest of the harvest would be taken in. So also here. At our Baptism, God poured out the Spirit upon us, gave us faith, and gave us a guarantee of what is to come. What will come? St. Paul says in his letter to the Philippians – **“... our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ,²¹ who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.”**

We have a guarantee that our body, mind and soul, with its pains and sorrows, will be transformed into a glorious body – all because of God’s promise to us through Jesus our Savior. That is our hope, our comfort, our peace in times of suffering.

“That’s great Pastor”, you may be saying, “but you aren’t going through what I am going through.” That’s right; I’m not, for each of us suffers in different ways.

I am not going to give you a reason for the different sufferings you and I face. St. Paul doesn’t do that either, but look at what he writes - he points to the promises that God makes to you. He points to Christ and the fact that this life is not the end. He gives you hope of what lays ahead – the time when you will be with your Lord! It is this hope, a hope that rests on Jesus, a hope given to us by the Holy Spirit that enables us to, as St. Paul says in the last verse, to wait patiently.

Wait patiently – that’s easier said than done, right? As we suffer sorrow, depression, pain, sickness – it’s easy to talk about waiting patiently, but harder to actually do it! But look at nature. How many of you have planted flowers or planted a field of corn? We know that the seed is going to die, but we, in hope, look for what that seed will produce—a garden lush with reds, blues or greens - a field overflowing with plump ears of corn. In the same way, we hope for something better as we suffer here on this earth. We look to what comes after this suffering and death – life – life in heaven - given and guaranteed to us by our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Brothers and sisters, as you go about your life in this world, as you battle temptation, as you wrestle with frustration, as you struggle with your sinful nature and the effects of sin, grasp tightly to the hope given you by God. The present sufferings you undergo cannot even compare with what lies ahead for you. This is your hope; a certain hope that rests on Jesus, a certain that leads you to wait patiently until that time you see you’re your physical eyes what you now see through the eyes of faith – that heaven is yours!

In the name of Jesus!

Amen.

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