

“Be ready to speak up and tell anyone who asks why you’re living the way you are, and always with the utmost courtesy” (3:15).

One of our human natures is that we want to avoid suffering as much as possible; instead, we like sweetness. This past Tuesday as I watched the *Dancing with the Stars* final, I wondered why so many people like watching that TV show. My conclusion is that people like that which is sweet rather than that which is harsh; they want to feel good (fantastic!) during that show time. (I also enjoyed that!)

Suffering of the Early Christians

In the summer of A.D. 64, a great fire destroyed much of the city of Rome. It was widely believed that the Emperor Nero was the one responsible for it. Despite his attempts to help the homeless, Nero was unable to allay suspicion. Thus, needing a scapegoat to blame, he selected the Christians for this dubious honor. Suddenly, to be a Christian was to be persecuted and killed. Waves of oppression and persecution, beginning in Rome, washed over the Empire. It was during this period that the apostle Paul was beheaded, and the apostle Peter was crucified upside down. Peter wrote this as a circular letter to the Christians in the Roman provinces in what is now modern Turkey. Peter speaks about the Christian attitude toward suffering.

How to Deal with Suffering?

In our lives, we are involved with two kinds of suffering. There is the suffering in which we are involved because of our *humanity*. Because we are humans, there come physical sufferings: sickness, distress of mind, pain of body, death, and sorrow. But there are also the sufferings in which we may be involved because of our Christian faith: unpopularity, disadvantage, persecution, sacrifice, or toil of the Christian life.

Throughout our human life, sufferings are unavoidable and/or sometimes unpredictable: recent natural disaster victims due to floods, tornadoes, storms, hurricanes, tsunamis. In the midst of their suffering, we are called to pray for them and support them in ways that we can share God’s love with them. The second part of the “Serenity Prayer” touches me as to how gratefully I should live each day: “...Living one day at a time; Enjoying one moment at a time; Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace; Taking, as He (Jesus) did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it; Trusting that He will make all things right if I surrender to His Will; That I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with Him Forever in the next. Amen.” – Reinhold Neibuhr – Embrace the hardship as it is when you face it, and trust the Lord that He will make it right; that will be our hope in Christ and prayer through Him.

It has been said, “A Christian is like a tea bag – not much good until it has gone through hot water.” Through we overcome any trial or hardship, we experience that the Spirit of God reshapes us into His will.

The Christian life has a certain blessedness which runs through it all. The Christian confesses that Jesus is the Lord. Peter says, "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord" (v.15). Accept the Lordship of Jesus in your heart, admit His Lordship upon your life, and prepare your own reason as to why you have hope in Christ!

Jesus Christ has also endured His Suffering of Troubled Times, and in that suffering bore our sins.

How many times have you ever heard the phrase, "*You can't understand until you've been there?*" What an amazing and wonderful truth that when we encounter times of extreme trouble, *God has been there!* One of the striking things about the Christian faith is the affirmation, "*... and the Word became flesh and lived among us!*" There is no other place on the religious landscape where one can say, "*God understands.*" God knows your troubles and the hardships that you are going through, because our Lord Jesus also suffered.

The words of one of the most popular hymns of all time contain the following words:
*"Have we trials and temptations, is there trouble anywhere,
We should never be discouraged, take it too the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful, who will all our sorrows share,
Jesus knows our every weakness, Take it to the Lord in prayer (What a Friend we have in Jesus).*

Celebrating this Memorial Day, we remember the sacrifices of those who gave their lives for our country. The spirit of their sacrifices will be remembered in our hearts forever. It has been said, "The world is blessed mostly by men and women who do things, not by those who merely talk about doing."

Andrew Carnegie once said, "As I grow older, I pay less attention to what men say. I just watch what they do." Doing right things for our country and for the Lord is much more important than talking about them; it requires courage, commitment, and even sacrifice. We are grateful to all of the soldiers who gave their precious lives for this country as well as for the peace of the world.

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The Bible says, "But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened" (3:14). I pray that God bless all soldiers who gave their lives as well as those soldiers who are serving all around the world. God bless all soldiers and their families as well. Amen.

"It's better to suffer for doing good, if that's what God wants, than to be punished for doing bad. That's what Christ did definitively: suffered because of others' sins, the Righteous One for the unrighteous ones" (3:17-18)

Power Point:

Two types of sufferings: humanity and Christian faith.

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