

Lent Meditation 4. 2nd March 2021



1Pt.2,20-25

“But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. ‘He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.’ When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. ‘He himself bore our sins’ in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; ‘by his wounds you have been healed.’ For ‘you were like sheep going astray,’ but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”

In a pivotal encounter between Peter, the disciple, and Jesus Christ, the matter arose whether the Saviour should avoid the path of suffering and be spared that experience. Absolutely he should, Peter declared. And this he did not just for Jesus’s sake, but for his own, as he supposed, rightly, that if Jesus chose this path this would set an example for the disciples also.

Jesus’ answer to Peter is unequivocal: If Jesus spared himself the suffering before him, if he chose a different path, then Satan would win and salvation fall; it would be man’s, but it would not be God’s way. (Mt.16,21-23) From this it would appear that suffering is an integral part of the way of salvation. It is the *suffering* servant of God who redeems (Is.53!).

In his epistle Peter reminds the church of its calling to live redemptively, which it can only do by a faith which is willing to suffer, is willing to obey God in weakness as Jesus did.

Redemptive suffering is not (generally) the kind of suffering that cannot be avoided but the kind which *can*. It is the kind of suffering that can only be avoided at the cost of discipleship, that is, at the cost of living redemptively. Christian suffering is the result of being in a state of weakness brought about by trusting in God and obeying him.

Christian suffering cannot, therefore, be avoided but through avoiding to trust and/or obey. As the examples from Jesus' path which Peter uses show, trusting in God and obeying him is done in weakness. He who trusts and obeys is weak against the strength of the evil, the unrighteousness, the injustice and wrongdoing which he resists for the sake of God who alone is good. This weakness is true resistance. But it is also redemptive as it carries the seed of faith, hope and love, even the strength of grace.

Christian willingness to suffer is never the intention to justify evil, but to resist it as trust in God and obedience to his will enable faith to do. May God give grace and a willing heart to suffer for Jesus' sake as and when the situation demands that we do.