

✠ 1 Peter 4:12-19 ✠

IN NOMINE IESU

Repent. You have daydreamed about suffering a hero's fate, reveling in the grandness of giving it all for the sake of the cause. You have wasted your time and neglected your duties while you spin tales of your own bravery, gallantly facing the forces of evil with nothing but a Bible and your eloquent and resolute speech. You have imagined yourself tired and beaten but with your head held high as you renounce the wickedness of those who oppose you. Repent. Christ did not suffer in this way.

Too many Christians glorify martyrdom while refusing to be martyred. Too many Christians talk the talk but do not walk the walk. Too many Christians hail the glorious company of the apostles and the noble army of martyrs while sacrificing the truth they died for on the altar of compromise and diplomacy. And then when their names are dragged through the mud – mud they often created themselves – they revel in their little martyrdoms and pride themselves in their suffering. Brothers, this should not be.

When one is asked what it means to suffer as a Christian, the response almost always involves mockery and martyrdom. We point to the Christians in China or South Africa or the Sudan, and say they are suffering as Christians; making a stand in the name of Christ against tyranny and oppression; fighting the good fight and preaching Jesus in the face of death threats. But this is glorified suffering. The Muslim and the Jew, they also suffer in this way, for these reasons. Such suffering is not unique to the Christian Church. Anyone can claim this suffering. This is a picture of the Noble Man of philosophy, not of the sinner who clings to Christ.

True Christian suffering is bound up in loss and separation even while professing God's great love. It is experienced in a myriad of ways throughout our lives, but perhaps its most poignant manifestation is in the death of a loved one. For in death there is a separation that we do not know how to overcome. We cannot bring Grandpa back. We cannot resurrect our loved ones.

Children should not get cancer; babies should not die in the NICU; teenagers should not die in car wrecks; our sons and daughters should not die in battle; husbands and wives should not leave us all alone. The Father should not have forsaken the Son. Yet this is according to the will of God.

Slice it any way you want, in the end God either willed it or allowed it. But really that is a distinction without a difference, just ask Job. In the end we don't know which and the end result is the same – separation and loss.

The suffering of a Christian is found in the suffering of Jesus. Who, to be sure, suffered insults and mockery and finally martyrdom, but whose real suffering was not at the hands of Pilate or the temple guards, but at the hands of His Father. For the real suffering of the Christ is not bound up in beatings, insults, and mockery. The suffering of the Christ is being separated from His Father.

And thus do you suffer, dear Christian – not because you are separated from God, in Christ you shall never be separated from the Father – but because in this life there seems a great gulf

between you and your heavenly Father; a separation between you and God. The insults are real and were first spoken at Golgotha. “Where is your God now? Why doesn’t He save you? Doesn’t He love you? Are you not His child?”

This is what you are baptized into, O Christian. Do not consider it strange when you suffer in this way, feeling the separation from God. You are not above your Master. You are baptized into Christ’s death. Your sinful self is destroyed, separated from God and killed on the cursed tree. Therefore, rejoice. For since you share in His suffering you will likewise share in His glory. This, my dear Christian, is your comfort: “Though I died, I am alive. And even though you die, yet shall you live.”

As a pledge of this I give you My very body to eat and My very blood to drink, thus incorporating you into My resurrection and life. Because I live, so you shall live.” But first, the cross. Therefore, when you suffer according to God’s will as He separates you from your sinful nature, entrust your soul to your faithful Creator as you do good: loving your neighbor, laying down your life for your friends and your enemies, and forgiving as you have been forgiven. He who is faithful will complete in you the good work which He Himself has begun.

Go in the peace of the Lord.

In the name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT.

✠ AMEN ✠