

The Second Sunday after Christmas

Hymns: 98, 108, 107, 105

The INTROIT

(Ps.93:1,2,5)

P: Thy testimonies are very sure:

C: holiness becometh Thine house, O Lord, forever.

P: Thy throne is established of old:

C: Thou art from everlasting.

P: The Lord reigneth, He is clothed with majesty:

C: The Lord is clothed with strength, wherewith He hath girded Himself. Hallelujah!

The COLLECT

Almighty and everlasting God, direct our actions according to Your good pleasure, that in the name of Your beloved Son we may be made to abound in good works; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

The FIRST LESSON

Isaiah 42:1-9

Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth. He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law. Thus saith God the LORD, he that created the heavens, and stretched them out; he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein: I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house. I am the LORD: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images. Behold, the former things are come to pass, and new things do I declare: before they spring forth I tell you of them.

The GRADUAL

(Ps.106:47; Is.63:16; Ps.145:21)

P: Save us, O Lord, our God, and gather us from among the heathen:

C: to give thanks unto Thy holy name and to triumph in Thy praise.

P: Thou, O Lord, art our Father, our Redeemer:

C: Thy name is from everlasting. Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

P: My mouth shall speak the praise of the Lord:

C: and let all flesh bless His holy name forever. Hallelujah!

The EPISTLE

1 Peter 4:12-19

Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon

you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf. For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.

The SENTENCE for the Season

(Psalm 96:11; 98:2)

P: Hallelujah! Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad before the Lord:

C: for He hath made known His salvation. Hallelujah!

The HOLY GOSPEL

St. Matthew 2:13-23

And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.

When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt: And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son.

Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying,

In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.

But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, Saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life.

And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judaea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee: And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.

1 Peter 4:12-19 — “Them That Suffer According to the Will of God”

INTRODUCTION

- I. REJOICE, INASMUCH AS YE ARE PARTAKERS OF CHRIST'S SUFFERINGS
- II. JUDGMENT MUST BEGIN AT THE HOUSE OF GOD
- III. THEM THAT SUFFER ACCORDING TO THE WILL OF GOD

CONCLUSION

The Second Sunday after Christmas

Hymns: 98, 108, 107, 105

1 Peter 4:12-19 — “Them That Suffer According to the Will of God”

Grace, mercy, and peace to you all from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Today is the Second Sunday after Christmas and the appointed Epistle reading is 1 Peter 4:12-19:

Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men’s matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf. For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

“Why? Why LORD?!” How often do we cry out like this? How often do we encounter difficult circumstances and then cry out with this question? Today’s text is given in answer to this question.

I. REJOICE, INASMUCH AS YE ARE PARTAKERS OF CHRIST’S SUFFERINGS

Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men’s matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.

Perhaps this may seem like a strange text for the Christmas season. Yet consider what the birth of the Lord Jesus caused. What must it have been like for the dear virgin Mary during the time of our Lord’s gestation? How much turmoil did the dear theotokos endure? What sort of scornful and judgmental looks did she face? What went through her heart and mind every time that she considered having to encounter a friend or family member? How could she explain her pregnancy? Who would believe her? What would the reaction be, even of her parents, when she

professed that Gabriel, the Lord's mighty angel, appeared to her and announced that she would be the mother of our Lord? Yet upon hearing Gabriel's recitation of the announcement given to him to deliver to her, dear Mary responded, **"Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word."** (Luke 1:38)

What would the discovery of Mary's pregnancy have caused poor Joseph to endure? What anguish did he suffer as he presumed that Mary had betrayed his love and trust? How deeply did his hurt penetrate his heart and soul? How many hours did he wail and cry? How long did he wrestle with this news of his betrothed being pregnant before he lovingly decided to put her away from himself discreetly? How deeply did Joseph suffer before the angel came to him with the news of relief and of the Gospel?

Then both Joseph and Mary had to endure the hard journey to Bethlehem and then again, knowing that they were carrying the LORD with them they endured the sad treatment of being put up in a manger. Nevertheless, they did not complain nor did they lose heart. Then, the shepherds came and invaded their privacy. Then the magi came with their strange gifts. Then the warning to flee to Egypt, to abandon all that Joseph had worked for, to abandon his livelihood and his customers, to travel to a land unknown to them. What fears must have filled their hearts. Why would the LORD allow this? Why?

Then the families in Bethlehem had their little babies taken from them and slaughtered before their eyes by Herod's soldiers! Oh how they must have cried. Oh how they must have wailed! **"Why LORD? Why?!!!!"**

Imagine for Jesus, Himself, growing up and knowing that all of this was on account of Him. Yes, He knew the answers. Yes, He knew the reasons. Nevertheless, He is truly and completely human. He would have experienced the anguish of knowing that all of this difficulty came to be on account of His advent. This would have been an additional burden to Him all the days of His life on this earth.

Nevertheless, the birth of Jesus, the Savior, Immanuel, is cause for rejoicing. So also, all that is in communion with His birth and His life and His suffering is cause for rejoicing. Moreover, being in communion with the suffering that comes on account of being in communion with Jesus is cause for rejoicing. Mary's pregnancy was cause for rejoicing, even though she endured much hardship and trouble in communion with it. Joseph's betrothal and marriage to Mary was cause for rejoicing, even though he suffered much confusion and personal loss in communion with her and her son. Even the murders of the innocent children of Bethlehem was cause for rejoicing if only the parents and families realized that this is a fulfillment of the prophecy of the Savior's birth. Yes, for those families who lived by faith in the Gospel, the birth of the Savior and all that came in communion with His birth was cause for rejoicing.

Peter, the beloved apostle explains:

Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.

Our questions of “**Why?**” rise up in us for several reasons. We cry out because the trials of our lives do not make sense to us. How can they? Our perspective is limited. We can only see as far as we can see. We often have no idea how God is using the events of our lives for good. Yet He has promised it.

We also cry out “**Why?**” as a plea for help. We cry out for an answer to our hurts and our fears and our doubts. We cry out for God to come to us in our troubles and to deliver us. We do not understand what is happening. We do not understand why the LORD is acting toward us in the way that we perceive. Thus we cry out for Him to soothe our souls with the only answer that can give relief. We don’t really need to know why the terrible things are happening so much as we need to know that God has not abandoned us in our suffering. We need to know that He has not abandoned us on account of our sin. We need to know that He still forgives us for Jesus’ sake. We need to know that our suffering is not a sign of being cut off from His Holy Communion.

This is why St. Peter assures us that these fiery trials are not something strange to those who are in communion with the Lord Jesus Christ, but rather, are a communion in His sufferings. Jesus told us that we would be treated in the same way as He was treated. The reason, the answer to the “why” is that we belong to Him. Since the devil and the world hates Jesus, how can they not hate us, too?

However, not all suffering is on account of being in communion with Christ. That is why the apostle warns us, saying,

But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men’s matters.

If we have acted hatefully or spitefully, others will treat us badly in turn. If we have stolen from someone or have taken someone’s reputation from him, we will be treated accordingly. If we have tried to usurp authority by sticking ourselves into other people’s business where we have not been invited or given permission to do so, we will suffer accordingly. But we can easily examine ourselves to see whether these are the causes of our suffering. If so, then the Holy Spirit has worked repentance in us and we confess our sins and receive God’s absolution. When we go to those to whom we have done wrong, sometimes we also receive their forgiveness and peace as well, certainly if they are also in Christ.

However, St. Peter also says, “**Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.**” If it is clear that we are being abused because of our association with Christ, then we have cause for giving glory to God on account of this abuse. This is true even in the daily things that come to us as Christians, things that happen to us that we cannot know why, like the things that happened to Job on account of his faith. Yes, the devil and the world attack us in many ways, and the LORD permits these things and even says that they occur in accord with His will. By these the LORD tests us and causes us to examine ourselves more intensely so that we realize more and more fully that our life is entirely in Christ and not of ourselves. Then we freely confess our sinfulness in all things and receive God’s righteousness as our own in place of our own corrupt and frail efforts. Then we are led to rely entirely upon the grace of God in Christ and we rejoice in His grace, mercy, and peace.

II. JUDGMENT MUST BEGIN AT THE HOUSE OF GOD

For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?

How does the judgment begin from the house of God? It begins with the birth of God's only-begotten Son. The house of God is judged according to the judgment of Jesus Christ. Jesus took our judgment of unrighteousness into His own body and supplied His judgment of righteousness for us. He was judged as guilty so that we would be set free. He took our sins and died so that we would be free to live in Him.

The judgment that begins with the house of God is in accord with His Holy Communion. Are we in His Communion or are we cut off by disobedience to His Gospel? Are we partakers of Christ's suffering and death, or do we cut ourselves off by insisting on our own ways of faith? Do we trust in the mercy of God supplied in Baptism or do we treat Baptism as something that we must somehow fulfill? Do we rely upon the good conscience of the resurrection that comes from being buried with Christ in Baptism, or do we rely upon the false notion of a good conscience that we attempt to produce by deciding to follow Jesus and by committing our lives to Jesus. Do we come to the Lord's Table to receive the unity of His body and the life of His blood of forgiveness on the basis of His worthiness given to us in Baptism or do we come imagining ourselves worthy on the basis of our self-examination of our understanding as if understanding somehow proves true faith rather than true faith being the source of understanding? God brings trials into the lives of His saints in order that we would be tested regarding the one in whom we trust. In whom are we truly trusting? In whose works do we believe that we have salvation? In whose faithfulness does our faith rely?

The apostle quotes the Old Testament Proverbs in making this declaration. He quotes from the Proverbs to teach us that this is not a new doctrine but has always been the way. Faith in the Gospel has always been God's work in His saints. It has never been something that they produced for themselves by their own efforts. The Law has never been the source of living by faith, but has always been the judgment that we need for God to generate faith in us so that we may live by faith, continuing in the faith that He has given us.

Those who reject and persecute the way of true faith will stand judged accordingly. For if God's judgment begins from His own household, continually damning His own children for their waywardness from the Gospel so as to show them that their salvation is His work alone, what will the final and complete judgment be for those who refuse to receive the repentance that the Holy Spirit works through the preaching of the Word of Law and Gospel? For them, all of God's loving rebukes will end up as punishments. They will continue to reject His rebukes all their days so as to face the final excommunication at the Last Day. Then they shall enter into the judgment reserved for the devil and the demons.

III. THEM THAT SUFFER ACCORDING TO THE WILL OF GOD

But not so for those who have been in the communion of the judgment that begins with the household of God. This is what is declared at the end of our text.

Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.

Here the apostle explains the right understanding of the true Christian's life of good works. The good works of the true Christian flow from the joy of knowing the faithfulness and mercy of God. Doing well is not something that one does out of obligation, for such works are not truly good. One that acts out of obligation does so begrudgingly. God cannot be pleased with such works. Rather, God rightly judges such works as evil and as contrary to His good and gracious will. Even though the works have the resemblance of good works outwardly, they remain evil because they are done from unrighteousness, for righteousness is the work of faith. Righteousness is God's work in Christ. We cannot attain to righteousness apart from the merits of Christ, who alone is worthy.

As God's children of faith, we trust God. We do not trust Him because of a choice that we make, for faith is not a choice. Faith is not a decision. Faith is the knowledge of God that is imparted through being brought into communion with Him. When God rejoins us into His Holy Communion, faith is born in us. When God comes to us through the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, our souls are renewed in the fellowship or communion that is created by the outpouring of the gift of indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Because God recreates us in His Holy Communion we know Him again as our God. This is the basis of faith. Doubt is the opposite of being in communion with God. Doubt is to turn aside from the knowledge of God's goodness and mercy so as to look to other sources for goodness and hope and purpose. Doubt cuts us off from communion with God. Doubt is the result of our own choices and decisions. Faith is the result of God's actions by which He restores us in His Holy Communion.

Thus, when we continue in God's Holy Communion according to His ordained means of grace, we do well. All that we do flows from His grace, mercy, and peace. This is the nature of God. This is the image into which He recreates us. As we abide in His Holy Communion, partaking continually of His Holy Communion, eating and drinking His forgiveness and life, His goodness is our motivation. His will is made to be our will. We act in accord with whom He has made us to be. God loved us and continues to love us and we therefore act as those who know His love in our lives. When bad things happen, we recognize that our Creator is faithful and so we consider our suffering to be according to the will of our good and gracious God. While we may not understand the "why" of our suffering, we nevertheless trust the One who knows the "Why" and we trust that His "why" is truly good. Then we rejoice in knowing His goodness even in our suffering, and even especially in our suffering. Then we turn from doubting to doing well according to the faith that the Holy Spirit works in us.

CONCLUSION

The Lord Jesus was born into this evil world to take unto Himself all of the suffering that comes on account of evil. The Gospel is the wonderful good news that proclaims this to us as absolutely true. Since He suffered all the evil that we deserve, according to the faith that He gives to us with the gift of the Holy Spirit we know and believe that whatever suffering that we encounter as saints of God is suffering that is in accord with God's will. Therefore we endure suffering with joy. Even the threat of death cannot steal this joy from us. We know the goodness of our faithful Creator. We know His goodness because of the Gospel of the one born of Mary in Bethlehem. This is our confidence. This is our everlasting hope and joy. This is our holy desire to do well in all things and to all people. As God loves us, so we turn to one another in His love. This is the identity that God gives to us in Baptism. This is the life that we eat and drink together in His Holy Communion. In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus forever. Amen.