

“Suffer gladly!” 1Pe 2:11-25

Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor. Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

We have often spoken about why the Church exists; to continue the work of our Good Shepard Jesus, to rescue people from under the power of darkness and to bring them into the Kingdom of God's Son. It is about eternal life.

So, how is this mission to be carried out? We have spoken about different ways how we as Christians should do it. The most direct one is when we tell others what Jesus Christ has done and accomplished, and what it means for them.

When we help them to see the greatest problem of this world, namely, our sin and then gently lead them to repentance and then proclaim to them life-changing message that there is forgiveness of all our sins freely given in Jesus name. Forgiveness and eternal life in God's presence. As God's gift.

This is, why we meditate on God's message every Sunday, this is, why we come together in Bible studies, this is, why we hold our morning and evening devotions at our homes, – to prepare ourselves to be faithful witnesses of Jesus.

We also have spoken that wonderful way to witness is to allow the joy and hope that we are filled with in the Lord's House to spill over in our lives. When we consider what Jesus, the Son of God has done for us, for each one of you.

When He comes here to be among us and to bless us, when we meditate upon what He has prepared for us and how certain His promises are, we are filled with joy and uplifted by hope, and it will not go unnoticed to those around us.

In our today's reading from first letter of Peter, we heard about one more way how we as Christians are called, I want to emphasize this, – we are called to – imitate our Lord for the sake of His Kingdom.

Did you notice what it was? That's a hard one, and I really struggled with this one. I really didn't like it. Peter wrote that we are called to 'endures sorrows while suffering unjustly.'

Did you hear it? You are called to endure sorrows while suffering unjustly. Isn't being a Christian a guaranty that God will protect us from all sufferings. There are many who preach like that. What's a point to follow this Jesus if He can't even keep sufferings away from us?

What should we do with these words of Peter? Maybe we need to argue that Peter didn't mean it literary, or just said it in his context, so they really don't apply to us. Or maybe we should argue that it is just Peter, this is not Jesus speaking, so maybe we could ignore his words.

It's tempting to do something, for I don't like what these words say. Just this last week I had a situation where exactly this happened. Someone very close to me had to endure sorrows while suffering injustice.

I was angry, and I guess I still am. Different thought run through my head about what could, should, must be done, so that the wicked ones receive what they deserve and so that justice triumphs.

Can you relate to such situations, where you are treated unjustly; where you have faithfully done your best, and then in return you receive unfair, unjust treatment? How do you feel?

"Eye to eye, tooth to tooth", right? Also, we live in the West, where 'my rights' is one on the most sacred phrases. I have my rights, I deserve justice, especially if you are right and have suffered injustice.

And in such situation Peter commands to 'suffer gladly', for that is a gracious thing in the sight of God. How appealing this message is as you try to bring people to Jesus?! This is what we are called to do...

Are you, Peter out of your mind? Have you never suffered injustice? He did suffer, he did. Remember, Peter was crucified and upside down at that. For he didn't consider himself worthy to die the same death that His Lord had died.

What makes Peter's suggestion even worse is that it is not something that he came up with. He simply echoes His Lord, Jesus. These are Jesus words: "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. [...] "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." (Mat 5:38-44)

Aren't these lovely instructions? You are welcome to be followers on this Jesus! These are hard words. Not because they are hard to understand, but because they are hard to live by. It goes so much against what is the most important for us. Do you know what it is? Yes, ourselves. Me. My interests, my rights.

Why should we do something like this? Peter in his letter gives us at least three good answers to this question. And they make sense. We should suffer injustice for the sake of eternal life, for the sake of our unbelieving neighbors, and for the sake of Jesus.

Let's see what they all mean. First, eternal life. Peter wrote that Christians are 'sojourners and exiles' in this world, and that therefore we need to 'abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.'

Remember, brothers and sisters, you belong to Jesus Christ, you are children of your Heavenly Father, you are heirs of God's Kingdom, and you are heading towards this ultimate hope, eternal life with your loving God.

Here, in this world, we are only sojourners. Remember it! This life and anything that happens in this life is not of ultimate importance. It still is important, of course, but not when compared with our future hope, our life in new heavens and new earth.

Our self, our old Adam within us clings to things of this world. We are not too worried if someone tries to lead us astray with false teachings and endangers our faith, but if someone does injustice to us, to our property, to our income, that's like touching our eyeball.

But as soon as we focus our eyes on our long-term hope, anything that happens here is only a temporary struggle in our journey to our true home. And if we get dragged into fights for our rights, passions of our flesh will be there waging war against our soul. Therefore, we better suffer injustice than endanger our faith.

Thus on one hand the hope of eternal life helps us to endure sufferings, on other hand, injustice and suffering remind us and lead us to our eternal hope, for the brokenness of this world is why we are waiting for new heavens and new earth.

Second reason to suffer was our unbelieving neighbors. Whenever someone does injustice to you, they need to justify their own actions, at least in their own eyes. For people seldom do injustice admitting that this is what they did.

They usually try to justify themselves by blaming the other side, – they deserved it, they are no better, this was their own fault, and so on. This is how we then try to deceive our conscience. Speaking about others as evildoers.

This is, why Peter writes: "So that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation." If we refuse to get into angry and dirty fight for the things of this world, there is no basis to accuse us anymore.

Then even our opponents will see our good deeds and if we can help them to see that our behavior is guided by our Lord and God, they are exposed to something they can't understand, something transcending this world.

When we suffer gladly, we show that our ultimate hope and our ultimate allegiance is not to the things of this world, but to something much, much greater. This is how we can give witness to those around us.

Jesus said: "Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you." In fact, they are not our enemies, they are slaves of sin and devil. And it is possible, that our glad sufferings in face of injustice can serve as a step to their salvation.

If we can endure sorrows suffering injustice and it can help to rescue someone from under the power of Satan, and bring to God's eternal kingdom, it is not such a high price to pay. Wouldn't you do it for those whom you love? Sure. Can we also do it for those whom Jesus' loves, and for whom He died?

The third reason was to suffer for Jesus. Peter goes in great length to show that when we suffer this way, we simply follow the example of our Lord and Savior, for this is exactly what He did for us.

He didn't stand on His rights, He didn't demand justice where the greatest injustice was done. He didn't overcome evil with power, He overcame it with good, with love, by humbling Himself ... till the death on the cross.

And this is how Jesus won the greatest victory. Remember, when the apostles experienced first injustices from the hands of Jewish leaders, they rejoiced for they were found worthy to suffer for Jesus.

It is a great honor if we are found worthy to suffer for Jesus, to share in His suffering. For that's what it is. The Church, all Christians are Christ's body in this world. You all are members of this body.

Where one member suffers, all suffer together with him. But the most comforting reality is that Jesus Himself suffers with us. This is where we can really experience His presence, and peace and joy that He brings.

When we gladly suffer injustice for the sake of Jesus, and for the sake of our unbelieving neighbors. This is where Jesus continues His victory over the evil in this world. This is where and how His true power is revealed through us.

And it is a great privilege if we are allowed to share these sufferings with our Lord Jesus, who suffered and died so that we could live. Therefore, suffer gladly for the sake of eternity for you are heirs of God's Kingdom.

Suffer gladly for the sake of your unbelieving neighbors, for that is a wonderful testimony about the power of eternal hope, and suffer gladly for Jesus, for He not only did the same for you, but even today, that's Him who suffers with you.

And the peace of God which surpasses all our understanding, keep your minds and hearts in Jesus Christ. Amen.