

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

My dear beloved flock, the text for our meditation this morning is the Epistle Lesson of Saint Paul's letter to the church in Colossae chapter one verses twenty-one through twenty-nine.

Boys and girls, I pray that you are doing well today as we gather around the gifts of God. Have you ever been in pain? I am sure you have. Pain because you skinned your knee and it hurts. Maybe you were told no you cannot go outside, so you have emotional pain at being denied what you desire. Have you ever felt pain because of someone else? For example, if I hit myself, would you feel the pain? I am sure you would feel sympathy for me, but actual pain? No that's not how pain works. Yet, in our text for today, Saint Paul says that He feels pain on behalf of Christ. He is filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions. What does Saint Paul mean by this? Ponder that question as you hear the rest of the sermon. You may go back to your seats and those who love you.

“<sup>24</sup> Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh, I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.” This is an odd, unusual, and strange saying by Saint Paul. Could it be that when Christ cried out, “it is finished!” upon the cross, that there was something more to be added that Jesus had not paid for?

One thing we need to get straight, Paul is not adding to the afflictions of our Lord upon the cross. When Jesus hung upon the cross, He bore the pain and the punishment on behalf of the

entire world. He was beaten, mocked, ridiculed, sentenced to death, even though He had done no wrong! There, He who lived a perfect life in our place became total sin for us, to the point that the Father turns His back on the Son in judgement. Bleeding and dying, Jesus dies the death that we deserve. Rising again from the dead, He makes us His dear beloved children through the power of His Holy Spirit in His word and in the Sacraments. On the cross, Jesus has paid the price fully for everyone. When He cries out “It is finished!” Everything is finished and paid in full! His atoning sacrifice provided a full and perfect ransom payment for the sins of all the world. Paul consistently testifies to the all-sufficiency of Christ’s atonement. So do the other sacred writers.<sup>1</sup> If it is paid in full, how is Paul adding to it?

### **What believers can expect in the world**

With this phrase, Paul is simply a reference to the treatment believers can expect as followers of Jesus in the world. Look at how much they hated our Lord. They mocked Him, betrayed Him, sought to entrap Him in His words, ultimately, they put Him to death on the cross. They absolutely abhorred our Lord. They hated Him so much that even after the crucifixion, they were not satisfied. They abused and killed the Apostles and other followers of our Lord. Even now, they still are not satisfied. They want to continue to add to his afflictions. Since Jesus is no longer physically present on earth, the hatred that his enemies once directed toward him personally is now directed toward his disciples. By suffering for the sake of the gospel,

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<sup>1</sup> Kuschel, H. J. (1986). [\*Philippians, Colossians, Philemon\*](#) (p. 136). Northwestern Pub. House.

therefore, Paul was undergoing hardship in Jesus' place. He was not doing it at all by himself, of course, but he was contributing his share, just as other believers were contributing theirs, to that measure of suffering the Lord has allotted to his believers on earth.<sup>2</sup> Saint Paul records some of those hardships in Second Corinthians chapter 11:

“Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one.<sup>25</sup> Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea;<sup>26</sup> on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers;<sup>27</sup> in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food,<sup>[b]</sup> in cold and exposure.<sup>28</sup> And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.”

### **Suffering for the Gospel on behalf of others so that they do not have to**

Why does Saint Paul undergo this suffering? For the sake of others and the gospel. In his divine wisdom, the Lord allows much suffering to come on certain believers for the gospel's sake. Paul and the other apostles certainly fell into that category. Other believers may not be called on to suffer much at all, but whenever believers suffer anything for the sake of their commitment to Christ, Jesus' afflictions are overflowing to

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<sup>2</sup> Kuschel, H. J. (1986). [\*Philippians, Colossians, Philemon\*](#) (p. 136). Northwestern Pub. House.

them, and they are filling up what is still lacking in the afflictions of Christ. Believers should not be surprised when they are called upon to do this. The disciple is not above his master, and Jesus warned his followers that they should expect the hatred of a world that hated him. Fellowship with Jesus means also sharing in his sufferings. Believers can still regard the mockery, ridicule, and all other physical and psychological blows struck against them because they are Christians as blows struck against Jesus himself.<sup>3</sup> Our afflictions may not be the same as the sufferings undergoing fellow Christians around the world. There is not as overt persecution in our country today, though it many someday come. Yet in other places of the world, Christians are disowned by their families. I know of one man who had not seen his father for over forty years, because his father said if the man came home, his father would kill him. Churches have to gather in secret meetings, Christians are abused, imprisoned, beaten, beheaded, not because they have committed a great crime, but merely for being Christians and following Christ. When we suffer for the sake of the faith, we are adding to the afflictions of Christ as His enemies continue to heap abuse upon abuse at Him.

### A Calming Joy

In the midst of these sufferings and afflictions, what should our reaction be? It would be very easy for us to fall into despair, bemoan the pain that has happened to us, weep, wail, and lose all hope. Yet, what is the response of the Apostles as they

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<sup>3</sup> Kuschel, H. J. (1986). [\*Philippians, Colossians, Philemon\*](#) (pp. 136–137). Northwestern Pub. House.

suffer? They are beaten and rejoice because they have been counted worthy of bearing the Name. Paul and Silas, when they are arrested and imprisoned, spend the night singing Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. In the midst of our sufferings, we can have a calm joy because we know Who we suffer with. We suffer with Christ. Even in the midst of suffering, Christ gives us the strength we need because He has already given to us the victory. In Him we find our joy and rejoice. As Paul says, “I rejoice for your sake.” Paul’s sufferings as an apostle could also bring him calming joy, because he knew those sufferings were benefiting the church. When the enemies of the gospel directed a special measure of hatred and violence against well-known leaders of the church like Paul, the practical result was often that lesser-known Christians were spared. By enduring hardship as their apostle, Paul was absorbing from them some of the things that the Colossians and others might otherwise have had to suffer. By his calm endurance and clear testimony even in suffering, Paul was encouraging believers everywhere to follow his example and stand firm in the faith.<sup>4</sup>

Even in the midst of sufferings and hardships, as we fill up the afflictions of Christ, let us always rejoice and rest in the peace that Jesus gives to us forever by His dying and rising again from the dead. Until that day, when all suffering passes away in the glorious light of heaven at His return.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard and keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> Kuschel, H. J. (1986). [\*Philippians, Colossians, Philemon\*](#) (p. 137). Northwestern Pub. House.