

What our Lord Jesus has done for us is a profound mystery. Who can fathom it? God, taking on our human nature, took up our pain and bore our suffering in His Passion and Death, making Himself an offering for our sins. This was prophesied in the fifty-third chapter of the book of Isaiah. You have heard this Scripture many times at Good Friday vespers, but hear it once more. Let the words penetrate your mind and enter deeply into your heart.

³ He was despised and rejected by men;
a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;
and as one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

⁴ Surely, he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows...

⁵ ...he was wounded for our transgressions,
he was bruised for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that made us whole,
and with his stripes we are healed.

⁶ ...the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.
...he makes himself an offering for sin

There is no philosophical explanation for our suffering and death, but we know that Jesus has accepted it as His very own, and that ultimately, we share in His victory over it. It is not, therefore, that we are to go *around* the cross, but rather, pass *through* the cross with Him. It is in our suffering and dying with Him, that we are saved.

In so many ways, these are strange and troubling times. It is a time of terrible tragedy in the world's history; there is great moral and social upheaval, but it is also an opportunity for tremendous grace. It is a time of fear, and yet, a time of salvation and peace. Such is the paradox in which we live. We face the dark sorrow of our suffering and death, and yet for those who accept our Divine Savior, this is unto the ecstatic joy of a resurrection to eternal life. In this life, we are, for a time, caught between sorrow and eternal joy—between Good Friday and Pascha. And yet, it is here

where we realize that whoever has God lacks nothing. This must have been what inspired St. Teresa of Avila to write these words in the cover of her prayer book:

Let nothing disturb you,
Let nothing frighten you,
All things are passing away:
God never changes.
Patience obtains all things
Whoever has God lacks nothing;
God alone suffices.

There are many tragedies in the history of humanity. The greatest tragedy of them all, however, without compare, is to lose God for whom we were made, He who is the fulfillment of all the longings of the human heart-- our everlasting happiness. Very many Christians, including a large number of Catholics, seem to have casually cast our Lord aside in their lives. Others reject Him outright. Then there are those who deny that there is any such thing as truth and moral goodness and, of course, there are those who deny God's

existence and embrace science as an alternative, making it a kind of religion. Losing God is tragedy far beyond all others.

As my mother lay dying, she was very afraid. I said to her, "You have sincerely confessed your sins and have been anointed. You have made your peace with God who loves you so very much and wants you to be with Him in heaven. You have nothing more to fear. You want to be with Him, and He is waiting for you on the other side. I hope that someday, that I too may be where you are right now—finally having made it through the trails and temptations of this life, and ready to be with our Lord forever." I prayed a Hail Mary with her. The fear went away; she was at peace.

Let us not despair, then, when we find ourselves on our own Mount Calvary. Jesus is there with us, hanging on the cross, taking upon Himself our sins, our suffering, and our death, which we ourselves could never bear alone. But He

does not bear all this in our place. He bears it with us and transforms it all by His Divinity. Let us be reminded, then, that our suffering and death is not useless, not meaningless, but in Christ it is the very conquering of death by death. In the inspiring words of the Holy Apostle Paul to Timothy (2 Timothy 2:8–13):

Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descended from David, as preached in my gospel, ⁹the gospel for which I am suffering and wearing chains like a criminal. But the word of God is not chained. ¹⁰Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which in Christ Jesus goes with eternal glory. ¹¹The saying is sure: If we have died with him, we shall also live with him; ¹²if we endure, we shall also reign with him...

Let us, then, endure the sufferings of this life with our Lord. And in the hour of our death, let us die with Him, knowing, with the certainty of supernatural faith, that we will live with Him forever. We know that whatever our present suffering, it is nothing compared to the glory, to the unending

happiness and joy that is to come (Rom. 8:18). Once again, in the consoling words of St. Paul:

We do not lose heart. Though our outer man is wasting away, our inner man is being renewed every day. ¹⁷For this slight, momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, because we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal (2 Co 4:16–18).

Glory to Your Passion, O Lord!