



**Coptic Orthodox Diocese of
the Southern United States**

**The Monthly Message
to the Fathers, the Priests
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Pain from a Christian Perspective

The Holy Gospel presents a mystical, interrelationship between pain and faith, wonderfully but mysteriously interwoven rendering the acceptance of pain, either for Jesus Christ's sake or for the promised glory, part and parcel of Christianity, and an indispensable prerequisite for discipleship to Jesus Christ. He Himself has said, *“And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple”* (Luke 14:27). St. Paul also said, *“and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together”* (Romans 8:17).

Therefore, it has become practically impossible to separate suffering for Jesus Christ's sake from the eternal glory; and pain has acquired so much value and elevation to the status of 'grant' or 'gift' for the chosen ones. *“For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me”* (Philippians 1:29-30).

The Indispensability of Pain

Sin has entered the world through Adam and Eve making pain and death the high cost that the Son of God had to pay as a ransom for liberating us from its consequences in order to grant us resurrection and life once again. *“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Romans 6:23). So, in actual fact, our share in Jesus Christ's pain is not a punishment or judgment but a grant that qualifies us to accept and receive the glory of His resurrection.

This partaking in Jesus Christ's suffering is achieved through crucifying our desires and all that has to do with the old nature, (the old man), going down the narrow road, entering through the narrow gate, passing through the fires of temptation. After that we will be prepared to behold the light of the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and enjoy the fellowship of the saints.

Pain, a Source of Gain

The most tangible advantage of pain is its effective power to wean us from the love of the world and all that is in it. This weaning process is similar to the one a mother adopts to wean her baby off of her breast in order to introduce solid food for their growth. This process entails providing a barrier between the baby and her breast such as smearing her breast with a repugnant ointment not harmful to the baby; but sours enough to make him avoid feeding from her breast. By analogy, we too, need to be weaned and liberated from the bond of lustful desires in order to be able to rise above the earthly ties to spiritual concerns because as St. Paul has asserted, *“For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for*

it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (Romans 8:68).

Therefore, pain and sufferings are the only tools for severing various ties to earthly concerns and desires, cutting off all fake desires of the body in order to experience the miracle of willful death from sin to taste the deposit of the joy existing in the Resurrection, the righteousness of Jesus Christ and fruitfulness for the kingdom. The best explanation of this process is given by our Lord Jesus *“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor” (John 12:24-26).*

Pain, a Proof of Love

The most authentic expression of our love for God is to bear pain for the sake of His name. Job offers an example of someone who loved God unconditionally. Although God was sure of Job's faith, true love and patience, yet God allowed Job to undergo various severe losses in order to defeat Satan's false allegations against Job's quality of worship having accused him of being opportunistic to avoid God's wrath and gain His favor over him and his family. However, Job passed all the tests with flying colors proving what is written in St. John's first letter *“We love Him because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19).*

God's love to us is unchangeable and steady kept in store for us since the beginning of the world being revealed to us in the fullness

of time (Galatians 4:4), *“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him” (Romans 5:8-9).*

Thus God has fulfilled His desire to restore mankind to their first status by causing His Son to pass through the fire of the cross till He completed our salvation. We now reciprocate this love by accepting to bear our cross and walk down the alley of suffering joyfully and willfully not forcibly, fearfully or grumblingly but with the Holy Spirit saying with St. Paul, *“I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church” (Colossians 1: 24).*

Pain, a Revenue of Power

“And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Corinthians 12:9). That was the answer St. Paul had received for his request to have that *“thorn in the flesh” (2 Corinthians 12:7)* removed; thus proving that although the road of suffering is utterly painful, yet it leads to the glorious everlasting life. A vivid example from the Old Testament is Abraham who, after having been given the promise of offspring as plentiful and innumerable as the stars in the sky, he came face to face with the faith-challenging trial of giving his own promised son as a burnt offering. However, against reasoning, and "contrary to hope", *“who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, 'So shall your descendants be.’” (Romans 4:18),* he accepted and chose to obey believing in God in Whose

hands he had committed his life. Thus, Abraham's faith became beacon and blessing to all generations and he saw with his spiritual eyes the coming of the Messiah, the Savior through his offspring. When we ask God's support, during our trial times, He will do so either through immediate response, delay in response or rejection of response. In any of these options, He will always remain faithful not to make us suffer beyond our capacity. *"No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it"* (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Interaction with Pain

When sufferings befall us, we inescapably interact with it either negatively or positively.

Negative Interaction

1. **Complaint.** It is a very common sin that jeopardizes the rewards and crowns prepared by God for those who bear patiently their calamities. Grumbling throws into oblivion God's multiple mercies that cover us every second and might drive us to anger and possibly the abominable desire for revenge and retaliation; thus robbing us of God's mercy and care. St. Paul advises saying, *"Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord"* (Romans 12:19).
2. **Blame.** It is so easy to find a way out of self search and self blame for our mistakes by casting them on others; thus robbing ourselves of the chance of discovering our faults

and the desire to reform them. As. St. James has said, *"But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death"* (James 1:14-15). Another detrimental outcome of blaming other people for our mistakes is igniting the spirit of judgment, anger, retaliation and envy. None of such negative feelings belong to our Lord Jesus, *"He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth"* (Isaiah 53:7). Did He not say *"But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust"* (Matthew 5:44-45).

3. **Escapism.** The Holy Bible teaches that pain and sufferings are the holy bumpy road on which we tread and the blessed narrow gate through which we enter into the kingdom of heaven. About those who cry out to the Lord, *"And they cried with a loud voice, saying, 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?' Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed"* (Revelation 6:10-11).

God comforts the hearts of those under sufferings saying, *“And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away”* (Revelation 21:4).

Positive Interaction

1. **Getting Ready.** Jesus Christ has not hidden from us the fact that we will face tribulations. Pre-informed is pre-armed; and therefore, His warnings are enough to make us well prepared spiritually and psychologically *“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world”* (John 16:33). Therefore, we should understand and conclude that sufferings are a God-given gift to His chosen people and signs of His unlimited love to us. In bearing our crosses patiently we prove the strength and genuineness of our love to Jesus Christ; and vividly manifest and proclaim our discipleship to Him. It is a truly unquestionable and unquestionably true fact that without pain and death there is no resurrection or eternal glory; without carrying the cross there is no discipleship to Jesus Christ; without communion with His Cross, we will not be able to participate in the glory of the Resurrection.
2. **Sharing with Jesus Christ.** There is a big difference between pain inflicted by evil people and that handed down to us from Jesus Christ. Accepting the latter with gratitude is the secret of our victory over sadness. Jesus Christ's wounds have become therapeutic to our injuries healing them. Thus we pray in the Agpeya “put to death our pains

by Your healing and life-giving passions”. Therefore, accepting our limited, finite afflictions will restore healing and purification from all the impurities of the body, soul and spirit.

3. **Sharing with Others.** Participating with others in their afflictions will bring about assistance and consolation to them and recompense to us. This reward from God will be manifested in the great joy in the heart, and energy to continue to bear our own troubles and sadness patiently while reducing our focus on ourselves and diverting our attention from our sufferings.

Types of Pain

In His words to the Philippians, *“that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead”* (Philippians 3:10-11); St. Paul helped us classify sufferings into two types:

1. **Inflicted Sufferings.** These are trials caused by our sins, negligence, evil desires, uncontrolled conduct. In addition, there are sufferings common to the nature of this life such as sickness, accidents, high cost of living, conflicts, to name a few. These self inflicted or caused by the world require wisdom, patience and God's assistance above all until they end and turn into a source of goodness and blessings.
2. **Willful Sufferings.** These are brought about because of our faith and love for the name of Jesus Christ. All sacrifices for the sake of His holy name, all strivings

against sin and worldly lust, all forgiveness to those who wrong us, all dying to our desires for the glory of God, all efforts to preserve our purity, and holiness, all attempts towards self-control, are in reality participation in Jesus Christ's sufferings. As St. Paul has confirmed *"I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church"* (Colossians 1:24). Thus, whenever we bear pain willingly, we actually go through the mystical process of crucifying the self, killing all that belong to the old man. This is in essence fellowship with Jesus Christ, honest proclamation of bearing the cross and manifestation of our love to the Lord; thus obtaining salvation and eternal life reiterating with St. Paul *"But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation"* (Galatians 6:14-15).

By *"the world has been crucified"* is meant that sin and Satan, its initiator, have been crushed by the power of the cross and left powerless over the redeemed believers.

By *"and I to the world"* is meant voluntary crucifixion of the old nature with all its traits and drives and death to the world and all that exist in it *"For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And*

the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever" (1 John 2:16-17).

By *"a new creation"* is meant a renewed nature that is maintained everyday by searching oneself and perpetual repentance. St. Paul expressed that need saying, *"You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: 'My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.'"* (Hebrews 12:4-6).

Articles on the Christian History

The Sixth Century

Pope Youannis II (505-516 AD)

His papacy witnessed a period of peace and tranquility because it was during the reign of Emperor Anastasius, the Byzantine Emperor who was inclined towards the anti Chalcedonian churches, adopted the faith of the Nicene fathers and the writings of Pope Cyril, the pillar of faith, and supported the churches of Alexandria, Antioch, and Constantinople. Pope Youannis reposed in the Lord in May 22, 516 AD, the 27th day of the Coptic month Pashons.

Pope Dioscorus II (516-518 AD)

In spite of the fact that he was the disciple of Pope Yoannis and supported by Emperor Anastasius, yet his ordination as pope upon the see of Alexandria was deferred for a while just to make sure of the people's choice and not the interference of the secular authority. He was favored for his lovable, respectable personality and eventually ordained at the Cathedral of St. Mark. Like his predecessor, he established communication with the bishops of Antioch and other Orthodox bishops to renew the Holy Communion in the Orthodox faith concerning the one nature of Jesus Christ. During his papacy, some outsiders attacked the Roman guard and his son Theodosius. This incident triggered the Emperor's rage. Consenting to the suggestions of some of the church elders, the pope personally visited the Emperor to ask for forgiveness and favor. While in Constantinople, the pope was insulted by some of the Arians. However, following the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, he wisely did not answer back. The papacy of Pope Dioscorus was a time of peace, but lasted only three years after which he reposed in the Lord on October 27, 518AD, the 17th day of Paope.

Pope Timothy III (518-536 AD)

He was the 32nd pope on the See of St Mark. After the repose of Pope Dioscorus, at the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the people elected for the papacy their beloved eloquent priest who was serving at St. Mark Cathedral. Ordained by the name of Timothy II, he established relations with Pope Severus of Antioch to renew holy fellowship in the Orthodox faith

against the Chalcedonian beliefs. Shortly after, Emperor Anastasius died and was succeeded by Julianus the Magnolian who knew nothing about Christianity. Mainly because of political gains and the influence of the Arians present within the empire, he sided with them and specifically with Bishop John of Khabadoch.

Hardships in Antioch and Alexandria

It so happened and during his visit to the big church in Constantinople in the company of Bishop John, the Emperor was met with unexpected rioting from the Chalcedonian congregation against those who did not adopt their faith and who were considered infidel. They also demanded trial of Pope Severus. On the other hand, there was another group shouting against the Chalcedonians. This great confusion necessitated bringing prayer to a halt. As a result, ignited with fury, the Emperor summoned Pope Severus from Antioch to Constantinople for trial and subsequent death sentence. In Alexandria, Pope Timothy of Alexandria was arrested and sent to exile and the Christian Copts were forced through bloodshed to adopt the faith of the Chalcedonian Convention. With regard to St. Severus, God interfered miraculously through the Empress Theodora who secretly met with St. Severus in jail convincing him to flee to Egypt. In 536 AD, he did escape to a town named Sakha, in Egypt, and stayed at the house of a pious man called Doretheos till he reposed in the Lord on the 14th of Meshir as is recorded in the Synaxarion.