

May 3 - Saturday

*Resist him, steadfast in your faith,
for you know that your brothers and sisters
in all the world are undergoing
the same kinds of suffering.
And after you have suffered for a little while,
the God of all grace, who has called you
to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself
restore, support, strengthen,
and establish you.
To him be the power forever and ever. Amen.*

1 Peter 5:9-11

Judo which means “gentle way” is a martial arts discipline that originated in Japan and became an Olympic sport since 1964. Its primary principle is based on the idea that one can defeat the opponent by using his strength or his force and making use of superior leverage. (Wikipedia) In his epistle to the Church, Peter did not only warn believers about the adversary’s desire to devour us, he also speaks about resisting the devil as he calls us to be steadfast in the faith.

He did not outline how to resist but the idea of judo’s principle came to my mind. The adversary’s intension is to break our spirits through the sufferings we encounter in life as we live out our faith in Christ. Suffering, pain, frustrations and ultimately physical death are the first rate cards that are in the devil’s hand. We resist the adversary not by running away but by facing the devil in his own playing field, in fact, using his own strength. At the cross, the devil thought that he won, only to be surprised by Christ’s resurrection. Death was the devil’s last and final card, his power ends in the cross but not with God.

So Peter speaks about the “for a little while” timeframe. As we remain steadfast, as we resist the adversary there will be all kinds of tricks and treats from the devil. We face them as it comes knowing that all of these take place only “for a little while.” Just as God raised Jesus back to life again, God will also “*restore, support, strengthen, and establish you.*” This is God’s word for us

today, resist, be steadfast in the faith for at the end of everything all of us will stand victorious with Christ!

Prayer:

*O God, give us the courage
to resist the adversary
by facing boldly what the devil brings
and staying steadfast in our faith. Amen.*



May 2 - Friday

*Cast all your anxiety on him,
because he cares for you.
Discipline yourselves, keep alert.
Like a roaring lion
your adversary the devil prowls around,
looking for someone to devour.*

1 Peter 5:7-8

It is reassuring to know that the early Christians are not superhuman but normal people like us, people who have burdens in life. Believers are not immune from harsh realities. We go through the same experiences just like anybody else. The nature of what brings anxieties to life may differ from generation to generation but it's the same anxiety that makes everybody vulnerable. The only difference is that we have a God to whom we can pour out all our burdens and anxieties, a God who cares. Other translations render verse 7 in this manner, *Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about what happens to you.* (NLT), *unload all your burdens on to him, since he is concerned about you.* (NJB)

Imagine going through difficult times and you have no one to speak or to share what is in your heart. In the midst of our pain and vulnerability, we need someone who listens and cares for us. In

his book, “*When Bad Things Happen to Good People*” Harold Kushner told a story of boy who went home late from school. His mother inquired why. He told her that he saw a boy whose bike was broken and he was crying. The mother asks, “Did you help him fix his bike?” “No, Mom,” he said. “I sat with him and help him cry.” As we age, we all go through various trials and trying moments in life. Sometimes we forget how those events unfolded that entangled us in a web of circumstances beyond our control. But we never forget those who stood beside us, those who love and care for us, those who cry with us.

But the word of comfort carries also a word of warning. Peter also speaks of the devil as a roaring lion waiting to devour us when we are on our weakest point, when we are vulnerable because of our anxieties. So he counsel the church – discipline your self, keep alert. The devil will not tell us that our God cannot help us. I believe that the devil will even encourage to pray and to really pray harder. However, the devil will tell us that there is a better option and a much easier one than what God offers. Sometimes, we call this option “the lesser evil” – we know it’s lesser but nevertheless it’s evil.

So while we rejoice and rest in the comfort of a caring God, let us not also forget in the midst of our anxieties the warning – discipline yourselves, keep alert!

Prayer:

*We never doubt
that you really care for us O God
but we are always tempted to believe
that the adversary can offer a better deal
more than what you can.
Help us cast this anxiety in you, Amen.*



May 1 - Thursday

*Humble yourselves therefore
under the mighty hand of God,
so that he may exalt you in due time.*

1 Peter 5:6

"Humility is something we should constantly pray for, yet never thank God that we have." (M.R. De Haan) Humility is one of the traits that are expected from those who follow Christ. Jesus himself exemplifies this trait. As pointed out by Paul in Philippians 2:7-8 "... he (Jesus) emptied himself, taking the form of a slave...he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death." If Christ our Lord is humble, we too must also be humble like him. Jesus himself said; "For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." (Luke 14:11) What does it mean to be humble? Phillip Brooks puts it this way, "The true way to be humble is not to stoop until you are smaller than yourself, but to stand at your real height against some higher nature that will show you what the real smallness of your greatness is." Peter calls us to humble ourselves 'under the mighty hand of God.'

Last night PBS featured the USS Enterprise, the first nuclear-powered aircraft carrier. The size of the ship is just mind-boggling. It is like a floating city with all its amenities, measured at 1,123 feet (342.3 m), she is the longest naval vessel in the world. Yet when you view the aircraft carrier from above, the massive steel built into one of the finest naval ships, when the mighty USS Enterprise sails into the blue oceans, she becomes a tiny dot on a wide and vast body of water. As one sailor said, "you've got to respect the sea." Great is the USS Enterprise but greater is the ocean where she glides and moves swiftly. We humble ourselves because we stand before God the Almighty every moment of our lives. We humble ourselves because we measure our lives by the life lived by Christ. Today, we are reminded, "*Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God...*"

Prayer

*O Lord, our God, make us humble
especially at times when we feel
that we have all the good reasons
to be proud. Amen.*

April 30 - Wednesday

*If you are reviled for the name of Christ,
you are blessed, because the spirit of glory,
which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you.*

1 Peter 4:14

“Water and oil don’t mix.” Philippines learn this lesson the hard way. On August 2006, a tanker carrying 2 million liters of oil sank 2 miles from Guimaras Island in Iloilo spilled its cargo causing massive destruction to the marine ecosystem in the area. The truth about water and oil not mixing together came to my mind upon reading the words reviled and blessed combined in our passage. In other translations the word insulted is used instead of reviled. How can one be blessed when insulted? What Peter wrote echoed what Jesus said in the beatitudes, *"Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.* (Matthew 5:11)

There are those who intentionally provoke situations that cause them to be reviled because of their faith in Christ and then cover themselves in the comfort that they are blessed. Others do it the other way – they are so in need of being blessed that one of the ways to have it is to seek circumstances that they will be insulted. In either way, they will have both – being reviled and being blessed. Try to stop someone who relentlessly preached on trains and buses. Tell them that while they have the freedom to preach the gospel other passengers also have the right not to be disturbed. In fact, notices are posted to tone down loud music or anything that bother others. Some would quote this verse or the section of Jesus

beatitudes that speaks about being reviled yet blessed.

Peter speaks of “sharing Christ’s suffering” as believers live in a world that is hostile to Christ’s radical ways. Being reviled or insulted because of our faith should not come as a result of our intentional provocation. Peter use the word, *if* – if you are reviled, it is not a qualification but a consequence. Being reviled comes as a result of being Christ-like in our lifestyle. Though believers are not always reviled, at times the world appreciates it, but *if* it does not, then Peter reminds us that we are blessed for God’s spirit rests in us.

We hope and pray that our co-workers, our neighbors and anyone whom we come in contact with will not revile us for being Christ-like in our ways, by being just, compassionate, loving, peaceful, God-fearing. But *if* we are reviled, do not be dismayed or be discouraged remember that God’s spirit rests in us. Water and oil does not mix but being reviled and being blessed at times can come together as an extraordinary combination.

Prayer

*Let the warmth of your Spirit
comfort and strengthen us
when we are reviled because of you.
This in itself is a blessing, O God. Amen.*



April 29 - Tuesday

*But rejoice
insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings,
so that you may also be glad and shout for joy
when his glory is revealed.*

1 Peter 4:13

One of the alternative pictures of Jesus that circulated in the 70’s

was a print with the inscription “The Laughing Christ.” For centuries we were accustomed to see a portrait of Christ with a solemn image. Although nobody really knew how Jesus looks like in person but the way he is depicted in the arts reflected the theology of the times and also of the artist. The picture was created by Willis Wheatley in 1973 and called it “Jesus Christ Liberator.” When he died the United Church of Canada acquired the rights to the drawing and later allowed a group of Paulist Priest in San Francisco to produce it under the name of “The Laughing Christ.”

Our text today calls us to rejoice! Although Peter warns us of the possibility of suffering as we follow Christ, it does not mean that we are not allowed rejoice. I like the portrait of the Laughing Christ because it provides me an image that breaks the somberness of the sacred. The Sunday school pictures of Jesus that I remember were all serious looking. It portrays to me the heaviness of life – no time for laughter and everything has to be considered a serious matter. John recorded the shortest verse, “Jesus wept.” But I guess Jesus also laugh while he was on earth, laugh loudly and regularly with his disciples, because to be truly human includes not only the capacity to weep but also the ability to laugh and to rejoice. It took me sometime to embrace this truth – it’s ok to laugh, it’s ok to rejoice!

There are people who highlight this truth in our community. Remember the times when meetings are so tense, the moments when everybody was absorb by the seriousness of the matter at hand, times as if we the world is so tight as we crack our heads to find solutions to problems – then in a split of a second someone cracks a joke and we laugh until tears falls from our eyes. I cherish those moments. It’s like finding water in the middle of the desert.

Conrad Hyers viewed humor in a different perspective, he said; “Humor is not the opposite of seriousness. Humor is the opposite of despair.” So if we find it hard to laugh then the spirit of despair is in our hearts. Believers in Christ are the most hopeful people; we live not just for today we are a people who look forward to something greater – in Peter’s language that day when “Christ’s glory is revealed.” People of God, we have the permission to rejoice, in fact to rejoice exceedingly!

Prayer:

*Teach us to rejoice O God,
what ever comes to life.
and to rejoice exceedingly! Amen.*



April 28 - Monday

*Beloved, do not be surprised
at the fiery ordeal
that is taking place among you
to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.
1 Peter 4:12*

“I hate surprises!” This is a comment we usually hear from people who want to live a life that is structured in sequence and predictable in its fine details. Surprises ruin and upset projected plans. In 1970 a film entitled “*Tora, Tora, Tora*” was released and shown in theaters portraying the events that happened on December 7, 1941 in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. The word *tora* is a Japanese word for tiger, but it was a coded word for “to” is the initial syllable of the Japanese word *totsugeki*, meaning "charge" or "attack", and "ra" is the initial syllable of *raigeki*, meaning "thunder bolt." (wikipedia) The whole strategic plan relied on the element of complete surprise which could be best described as “a thunderbolt attack.”

Our devotion today opens with the word, “beloved, do not be surprised...” Notice the word beloved. These words are addressed to us, we who are dear in God’s heart, God’s beloved. Do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal, not just an ordinary ordeal but a fiery one. The word fiery implies intense heat which gives us a picture of boiling and raging lava flowing from a volcano. Peter assured us that this is not something strange but advice us to take the experience of a fiery ordeal as a testing moment.

There are Christians who believe that the moment they accept Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior every thing in life flow easy, gently and smoothly. There will be no more problems in life be it money, relationships or anything else. Prosperity is the key word in fact some called this kind of ‘theology’ Prosperity Gospel. Peter and the early church were not in for this kind of theology. He prepared us for unpleasant scenarios which is a mild term compared to fiery ordeals that is to come.

Think about past scenarios in your life where the “fire was so intense.” look back and reflect. What lessons did you learn from the experience? Who help you walk through the fire? How did it help you shape and strengthen your faith in God?

As we look back our past with gratefulness and even as we wait with great excitement and anticipation the future that God unfolds for us – let us remember that life has ‘fiery ordeals’ along the way. God’s word assured us that this is not something strange – embrace it, be ready, do not be surprised!

Prayer:

*We do not pray
for fiery ordeals to come, O God
but if it comes, prepare us properly. Amen.*