

St. Paul's Teaching on the Church

Michael Barber, Ph.D. / John Paul the Great Catholic University © 2015

Twitter: @MichaelPBarber / Email: mpsbarber@yahoo.com / Website: www.TheSacredPage.com

Suffering and Glory

So I ask you not to lose heart over *what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.* (Ephesians 3:13)

The meaning of 'glory' has puzzled all interpreters.—Chrys Caragounis¹

... a logic which we can hardly analyze.... It is the language of the heart.—J. Armitage Robinson²

And Jesus answered them, "*The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified.*" (John 12:23)

The Bible as the Book of Suffering

Sacred Scripture is a *great book about suffering*. Let us quote from the books of the Old Testament a few examples of situations which bear the signs of suffering, and above all moral suffering: the danger of death (Isa 38:1–3), the death of one's own children (Gen 15:16; 2 Sam 19:1) and, especially, the death of the firstborn and only son (Tob 10:1–7; Jer 6:26; Amos 8:10; Zech 12:10); and then too: the lack of offspring (Gen 15:2; Gen 30:1; 1 Sam 1:6–10), nostalgia for the homeland (Ps 137), persecution and hostility of the environment (Ps 22:17–21), mockery and scorn of the one who suffers (Job 19:18; 30:1, 9; Ps 42:11; 44:16–17; Jer 20:7; Isa 53:3), loneliness and abandonment (Ps 22:2–3; 31:13; 38:12; 88:9, 19); and again: the remorse of conscience (Ps 51:5; Isa 53:3–6; Zech 12:10), the difficulty of understanding why the wicked prosper and the just suffer (Ps 73:3–14; Eccl. 4:1–3), the unfaithfulness and ingratitude of friends and neighbours (Job 19:19; Ps 41:10; 55:13–15; Jer 20:10; Sir 37:1–6), and finally: the misfortunes of one's own nation (Ps 44:10–17; 77:3–11; 79:11; 89:51; Is 22:4; Jer 4:8; 13:17; 14:17–18; Ezek 9:8; 21:11–12; Dan 3:31–40; 9:16–19).

In treating the human person as a *psychological and physical "whole"*, the Old Testament often links "moral" sufferings with the pain of specific parts of the body: the bones (Isa 38:13; Jer 23:9; Ps 31:10–11; Ps 42:10–11), kidneys (Ps 73:21; Job 16:13; Lam 3:13), liver (Lam 2:11), viscera (Isa 16:11; Jer 4:19; Job 30:27; Lam 1:20), heart (1 Sam 1:8; Jer 4:19; 8:18; Lam 1:20–22; Ps 38:8, 10). In fact one cannot deny that moral sufferings have a "physical" or somatic element, and that they are often reflected in the state of the entire organism. (John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, no. 6)

Suffering, Fatherly Discipline, and Purification

For though in the sight of men they were punished, their hope is full of immortality.⁵ Having been *disciplined* a little, they will receive great good, because God tested them and found them worthy of himself; ⁶*like gold in the furnace he tried them, and like a sacrificial burnt offering he accepted them.* (Wisdom of Solomon 3:4–6)

When he slew them, they sought for him; they repented and sought God earnestly. (Psalm 78:34)

The Suffering of the Righteous

While it is true that suffering has a meaning as punishment, when it is connected with a fault, *it is not true that all suffering is a consequence of a fault and has the nature of a punishment.* The figure of the just man Job is a special proof of this in the Old Testament. (John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, no. 11)

¹ *The Ephesian Mystery: Meaning and Content* (ConBNT 8; Lund: Gleerup, 1977), 112 n. 61.

² *St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians* (2d ed. London: Macmillan, 1904); cited in Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* (vol. 42; Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1990), 191.

The Cross as Glory

³⁵ And James and John ... said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." ³⁶ And he said to them, "What do you want me to do for you?" ³⁷ And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, *one at your right hand and one at your left*, in your *glory*." ³⁸ But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" ³⁹ And they said to him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; ⁴⁰ but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared." ... ⁴⁵ For the Son of man also came ... *to give his life as a ransom for many*." (Mark 10:35–40)

And with him they crucified two robbers, *one on his right and one on his left*. (Mark 15:27)

God's Wisdom as Christ Crucified

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ... ²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³ but *we preach Christ crucified*, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, *Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God*. (1 Corinthians 1:18–24)

The Church as the Body of Christ

I have been crucified with Christ; *it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me* (Galatians 2:20).

... he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, *why do you persecute me?*" ⁵ And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "*I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting...*" (Acts 9:4–5)

Sharing in the Afflictions of Christ

Now *I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church*, ²⁵ of which I became a minister according to the divine office which was given to me for you, *to make the word of God fully known*, ²⁶ *the mystery hidden for ages and generations* but now made manifest to his saints. (Colossians 1:24–26)

If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. ⁷ Our hope for you is unshaken; for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort. (2 Corinthians 1:6–7)

If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together (1 Corinthians 12:26).

The Bride of Christ

... husbands should love their wives *as their own bodies*. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church, ³⁰ because *we are members of his body*. ³¹ "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh" [Gen 2:24]. ³² This is a great mystery, and *I mean in reference to Christ and the church...* (Ephesians 5:28–31)

The Family of God

I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these instructions to you so that, ¹⁵ if I am delayed, you may know how one ought to behave *in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth*. (1 Timothy 3:14–15)

I do not write this to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my *beloved children*. ¹⁵ For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. *For I became your father in Christ Jesus* through the gospel. (1 Corinthians 4:14–15)

The Temple of God

So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but *you are fellow citizens* with the saints and members of *the household of God*,²⁰ built upon *the foundation* of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being *the cornerstone*,²¹ in whom the *whole structure is joined together* and *grows into a holy temple in the Lord*;²² in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. (Ephesians 3:19–22)

Christ's Glory in the Church

When you read this you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ,⁵ which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;⁶ that is, how the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.⁷ Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace which was given me *by the working of his power*.⁸ To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,⁹ and to make all men see what is *the plan* [Gk *oikonomia*] of *the mystery hidden for ages in God* who created all things;¹⁰ *that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places...*¹³ So I ask you not to lose heart over *what I am suffering for you*, which is your *glory*...²⁰ Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think,²¹ to him be *glory in the church and in Christ Jesus* to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen. (Ephesians 3:7–10, 13)