

Jubilate Sunday [Easter 4] – John 16:16-22

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Around the year 966 BC, a momentous undertaking began in the lives of God's people. Israel's monarch, the wise King Solomon started construction of the temple in Jerusalem. For centuries after its completion, the temple was the very dwelling place of God for His people. The temple was the central location where the faithful encountered the revealed God who forgave sins and redeemed sinners. Only the finest of gold, cedar and olive wood, and tapestries would adorn the dwelling place of the living God.

Massive stone blocks were placed at the foundation and set into place for the walls. However, in regard to these mammoth stones, no sound of axe or hammer or iron tool was heard at the site of the temple as it was being built. The rocks were simply slide into place with a deep dull "thud!" These rocks were prepared beforehand at the quarry, where stoneworkers labored to make sure that each rough and jagged boulder was ready to build the house of the Lord. You can bet there were not a few axes, hammers, and iron tools which hacked, split, and grinded these stones.

Perhaps we may feel like these stones. Axes and chisels and crosses and trials hammer away at our lives. Life in this world is neither easy nor fair. We lose loved ones in death. We see family and friends suffer. We deal with difficulties every day. Yet, did the Lord not promise this would be so? "...You will weep and lament ... you will be sorrowful... you will have sorrow now..." Are we not all subjected to the cross in this life? Why does God place us under severe trials? Why is it that God lays so many crosses upon His own? Isn't He a friendly, loving God?

The crosses which the Lord sends are not meant for our destruction, but for our greatest good. So Paul urges us to rejoice in sufferings, since we know that tribulation produces patience. If there were no tribulation, how would patience be exercised? If there were no persecutions, from where would the crowns of the martyrs come? If there were no strife, from where would the song of victory sound?

The virtues of gentleness and kindness are increased by cross and tribulation. In the darkest trials we learn of our own lowliness. In the midst of seeking help and comfort from God, how could we turn our backs on helping and comforting someone else in need? We've created a mere façade for ourselves if we imagine that we will financially benefit most from Christ. The theology of glory would trick us into believing that because we're Christians, our marriages will be happier, our children will be more well-behaved, and our bank accounts will flourish. We fool ourselves to think that because we are Christians, life is suddenly easy and understandable. Crosses continue to abound in our lives.

Why must this be? The disciples in the book of the Acts of the Apostles say it best: “We must, through much tribulation, enter into the kingdom of God.” We face much tribulation and many crosses in our lives. Yet, we don’t bear those crosses alone. The One who bore the cross takes His place beside us. While the Lord did promise sorrow, weeping, and lamentation, He promises that they will last only a short time and that everlasting joy and comfort will follow in the heels of our crosses.

St. John illustrates this point with a common example. In today’s Gospel, it is written: “When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world.” As a day born out of time, the definition of Mother’s Day finds its true meaning in today’s Gospel: by the pain of a wife in labor, a child is brought into this world. Mothers are worthy of our highest praise. It was, after all, God Himself who burdened wives with the pain of bearing children. “I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children.” Yet God makes an exact assessment of the burden He shall place on each mother – He is always in control. And yes, He is also the one who gives the joy that a child is brought into the world. Similarly, by the cross of tribulation, God brings forth rebirth and renewal into eternal life. God makes an exact assessment of the burden He places upon His redeemed children, knowing full well that joy awaits them and Him in eternal life. For as the woman rejoices that a child is born into the world, so is the church filled with exultation at the multitude of the faithful – you, me, and all who are born into eternal life.

As a traveler yearns to be home after a long journey and when he encounters unfortunate circumstances on his trip, he wishes all the more deeply to return home. So is our desire for union with our Lord in heaven elevated when facing tribulation. But know this, dearly beloved, all crosses and trials shall cease one day, and there will be eternal joy in its wake. As God sustains both a mother and child after birth, so He brings eternal life to both your body and soul through His deceased, but Resurrected Son.

The Son, Christ Jesus is the Chief Cornerstone. Solomon and Israel constructed the temple out of polished and carved rocks. The scene at the temple construction site was relatively quiet. But the clanking and hammering could have been deafening at the quarry. Yet what was the end result? Perfectly shaped blocks--smooth and squared-- were ready to build into a mighty house in which the Lord would dwell. So now we too are being cut into polished stones. “You yourselves, like living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” So make a joyful noise unto God all ye lands, because He has sent redemption unto you, His people. It was necessary for Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day and thus to enter into His glory for you. After crosses and the tribulations end, we will rejoice with our Lord and no one will take that joy from us. Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠