

Easter III

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[0 : 0 0] May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our Rock and Redeemer, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Please be seated. One of the clearest things that we can see in this world is the reality of suffering. All of us today know this to be true because we have experienced this reality in one form or another.

Whether it is through chronic pain, mental anguish and anxiety, persecution from our family or our colleagues, or in sharing the suffering of those who are very close to us, no one has escaped the brutal reality of suffering.

Friedrich Nietzsche, one of the most influential philosophers of the 20th century, said, To live is to suffer. No one escapes it. And even when we are freed from suffering's grasp for a moment, its cruel hands grasp us yet again and pull us back under the water.

And with no relief, the world around us moves on, often with indifference and contempt. And this is how our gospel text describes our present condition.

[1 : 1 6] After the disciples were confused about Jesus' teaching about going away and then coming again, Jesus explains that when he goes away, they will weep and they will lament over his death.

And the world will rejoice because of it. In due course, when Jesus was crucified, the disciples were sorrowful and fearful of the coming days. There was no hope left, and their suffering overtook them.

Fear of the Jews led them to all hide and wait, to wait out the days in solitude, weeping for their condition, while the world was rejoicing because Jesus had been taken away from them.

Like the disciples, our suffering, because of our Lord's absence, is accompanied by sorrow and weeping. The days never seem to end, even though we may feel like that's all we want in this life.

Jesus describes this reality with an analogy of pregnancy and childbirth. The days of pregnancy can be tough, but nothing is quite like the time when labor comes upon a mother.

[2 : 2 5] The hardships of pregnancy are plenty, physically, mentally, and spiritually. And even though the pregnancy is difficult, the particular hardship of childbirth can be enough to bring sorrow and fear, because the hour of the most intense hardship is approaching.

But, when the pain of childbirth is extreme, the long-awaited hope is brought forth. Life and inexpressible joy are brought forth from suffering.

The intense pain that was just happening is now completely overshadowed by the act of new creation. A child has been born, and it has all been worth it.

In an analogous way, when the disciples were in their greatest moment of fear and trepidation, Jesus rose from the grave and appeared to them in the place they were hiding. The suffering they had experienced had been long forgotten.

An inexpressible joy over the resurrection of their Savior washed over them like a flood. After Jesus ascended into heaven, the return of suffering was at hand.

[3 : 34] As we know, the disciples experienced many hardships and suffered great things. The Apostle Paul experienced many of these sufferings, as we read about in Acts and also in his epistles.

But the reason why they didn't lose hope, like the disciples did before the resurrection, was because they knew that in a little while, Jesus would return. And their sorrow would be turned into joy.

That was their hope during life, and it was through their suffering that they received joy. For them, suffering was a promise that joy was going to come. And it was going to be way beyond anything that they could experience in their suffering.

Friends, this is our predicament. We suffer in this world that seems to have no hope in the eradication of suffering. It is thought that the best thing that anyone can do is to keep on living and hope that they can have a good time along the way, because sooner or later it will end.

Just have fun on the journey. Now, while that may seem true in our experience, we do not have to think this way. The reality is this. Our suffering will end.

[4 : 49] Not only that, but the joy that is to come will swallow up all the experiences of pain that we had to endure, and are enduring at this moment. Through Jesus' death, he experienced joy and exaltation.

Through his sorrow, he became free from sorrow. And because of our baptism, we live in hope of the exact same thing. Our baptism grafted us into the body of Christ, and that means that our suffering will lead us to joy.

This is not some fanciful hope with a slight chance of it coming true. It is sure to happen. If we continue in this life and commit to our Lord through it all, he is sure to provide us relief from suffering, and we will become like him.

But how do we know this? Because Jesus says this, That is not some hopeful thinking.

The one who experienced the most suffering has told us that this is our hope. So keep fighting the good fight. Keep running the race. There is light at the end of the tunnel.

[6 : 11] And that light is the warmth and love of the divine trinity. Every tear will be wiped away, and true, lasting peace will be ours for all eternity.

This is our hope. And let us encourage one another as we suffer together, awaiting our eternal destiny of true and lasting joy. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Amen.