

Dear heavenly Father, every time we go through trials in this life, remove from our minds all the devil's lies that we are suffering to pay for our sins. Whether the suffering is a direct consequence of our sin or of Your loving discipline alone, it is by Your grace that You have permitted these our afflictions to come upon us. Teach us to trust Your ways, that through these trials, You will fulfill Your promises to strengthen our faith and draw us ever closer to You. Amen.

As [Jesus] passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. We must work the works of Him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." Having said these things, He spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then He anointed the man's eyes with the mud and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam"(which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing. The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar were saying, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" Some said, "It is he." Others said, "No, but he is like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." So they said to him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" He answered, "The Man called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' So I went and washed and received my sight."

In Christ Jesus, who has enlightened us by His Spirit so we no longer suffer from our first-birth blindness, but see clearly His salvation, dear fellow redeemed:

If you were present at the time of our Gospel lesson when the paralyzed man was lowered through the roof and heard Jesus' opening words: "Take heart, My son; your sins are forgiven." – how would you understand Jesus' greeting? Perhaps you would wonder what sin that man committed, which led to his paralysis? Or that he was an embittered man trapped in a body that could not move and he was actively blaming, even cursing God on account of it?

You and I know how easy it is for us to allow ourselves to be tempted to think about our own illnesses and injuries that God is somehow repaying us for our evil thoughts, words and deeds. That is what the disciples immediately thought when they came upon the man born blind. They asked Jesus: "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" But our Lord graciously redirected their thinking and made the point even for us who believe in Him today: **Find God's Saving Works in Suffering, not His Condemnation.**

Recently in our daily devotional book we have been reading how the devil used Job's so-called friends to conclude that all the misery he was enduring was due to Job's wickedness. In his grievous suffering Job allowed himself to be overwhelmed with such thoughts at times, but God in His grace would pull him out of that spiritual pit with the remembered and spoken word of the Gospel, that is, the love of God toward him and all people in the promised Christ who would come and defeat our sin, death and even hell.

The Law of God is written in every sinners' heart, so the lies of our spiritual enemies find eager ears among us. We imagine that if we actually have done the evil that has led directly to our suffering, we can also somehow do the work to fix things and extricate ourselves from that suffering. But it never works that way; it cannot. The condemnation we naturally feel on account of our sin may be dulled for a time by our strivings to do good, but the voice of condemnation is always lurking behind the scenes waiting for the moment to shriek again and throw us into the pit of deep despair.

We are not told how much this blind beggar got to hear of the exchange Jesus had with His disciples? When they asked if this man's or his parents' sin caused this beggar's malady, did it strike a chord with him? Was this a persistent question of his own running through his mind for the past thirty or more years? When Jesus' enemies attacked this man who could now see for being healed on the Sabbath, wanting him to condemn his Healer, he refused. They proceeded by confronting his parents, but so fearful of condemnation themselves they disassociated from their son, claiming he was old enough to speak for himself. When this man persisted in refusing to condemn Jesus, they excommunicated him from the Jewish church.

Just because Jesus brought this great blessing to this poor man that day, his suffering multiplied by being spurned by his parents and scorned by his religious leaders. But by the end of this account we see our Lord's great saving work taking place through all of it. Jesus would return to him and identify Himself as Christ the Savior. The man then declared, with what seemed like his entire world opposing him: "Lord, I believe!" and then we are told he worship Jesus as his Savior. So there we find the saving works of God in the midst of this man's ever compounding suffering.

II

We cannot always see the saving works of God at work in the midst of our sufferings, but we trust the promises of our Lord that this is what He does. What Jesus said specifically in the case of this man born blind: "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents,

but that the works of God might be displayed in him.”, is promised to us as well. We read in Romans 8 these words of the Lord’s Apostle: “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed in us. ... we know that for those who love God all things work together for good.”

Whenever and however you suffer in this life as a Christian, know this: These afflictions are not punishments from God. Jesus was condemned already for all your sins by His voluntary death upon the cross. That blood shed there cleanses you from all your sin. Based on this we along with the Apostle can confess: “we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”

Do you see how these saving works of God through His Spirit even in the midst of our sufferings, or should we say instead? - on account of our sufferings, benefit us for all eternity? But the saving works of God in the midst of our suffering benefit not only us personally, but even our neighbors who witness the grace of God at work in our lives of suffering.

Those witnessing this great miracle of Jesus healing the man born blind and how his suffering was compounded through his disowning parents and his vile religious leaders also witnessed the saving works of God. Jesus took His disciples off the condemnation track by saying to them: “We must work the works of Him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” The works of God are carried out by His Church here on earth, namely forgiving sins, bestowing eternal life and confirming the certainty of everlasting salvation. Truly the eternal Light has come to our darkened world.

Lift up your hearts my fellow redeemed, regardless of your many and varied forms of suffering. We pray for a strengthening of faith, but it often comes through suffering. Our Lord draws us closer to Him in our sufferings, causing us to depend and rely on His many promises. We do not pray that our suffering would increase, and rightly so, but recognize that our Lord will use all our trials in this life for our eternal welfare. That is how great He is!

When you are assailed by condemnation in the midst of your suffering, tell the devil to go back to hell with all his lies. Even if you have fallen into a funk spiritually because you allowed the word of condemnation to oppress you, know that there is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. For those times you

did not trust in Christ's full payment for your punishment and fell for Satan's lie, know that this unfaithfulness is forgiven you.

Last Thursday was St. Michael's day when we call to mind that glorious description of Good Friday in Revelation 12: "Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world--he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. And I (John) heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, 'Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.'"

The blood of the Lamb defends you from all those hellish words of condemnation. Trust that even in your suffering, my fellow redeemed, you are blessed for Jesus' sake. O sing to the Lord a new song! For He has done marvelous things! Amen.