

### 7-20-2025 Pastor's Corner:

Some internet wit posted an aphorism the other day. Something like, Protestants find sin in pleasure, Catholics find goodness in suffering. It is something of a perennial observation that comes back in multiple places and styles: Northern Europe vs. Mediterranean, Prussian vs. Bavarian, Yankee vs. Reb. I don't know about you, but I always hated it everywhere it shows up. It superficially might fit, but the second you scratch the surface it doesn't. The real point is to elevate some third group that is neither Protestant or Catholic above such trivial concerns as sin and suffering. As if all the sin and suffering in the world would just disappear if we all were as flippant as the enlightened wit.

The Apostle Paul in our Epistle lesson for the day (Colossians 1:21-29) makes one of his deepest statements. "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church." The world might have ever shifting ideas of what is sin but there is always something that the world thinks is sinful. The natural law is too powerful, written on our hearts, for the world to get away from sin for that long. With sin what the world tries to do is get the individual to justify themselves and the larger community to act like Pharisees about ceremonial laws instead of moral laws – stop self-reflecting and start cancel culture. We might lose the word sin, but we never lose the concept. Suffering is different. The World, that third enlightened group, doesn't know what to do about suffering. The Apostle Paul does.

Now, not all suffering is the same. If one suffers because they have trespassed, that is earned. "For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? (1 Pet. 2:20)" The rhetorical answer is none. Suffering in itself can just be the due natural punishment of sin. If we avoid it, it is by the mercy of God. Because we are all sinners. St. Peter in his contemplation would say, "but rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed (1 Peter 4:13)." To Peter there is a suffering that shares in Christ. It is more a reflection of what Jesus had instructed them: "It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household. (Matt. 10:25 ESV)." But Paul takes it beyond emulation. "I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions." Ponder for a second how remarkable that is. The bearing of the cross is not an emulation, but participation.

To Paul the church is the body of Christ. And "whatever you do to one of the least of these, you have done unto me (Matthew 25:40)." Suffering that is endured for the sake of Christ or his church, suffering that is taken on for goodness, is a participation in Christ. If we endure such suffering, we are being conformed to Christ. It is not as the wit thinks that the

Christian finds goodness in suffering. Because all suffering is ultimately because of a sinful and broken world. But innocent suffering is a participation in the cross. And the cross has been redeemed. The cross is where all those sins have been collected and paid. The cross is the beginning of the glory. The Christian might rejoice in these sufferings, because the mystery of God is being revealed.

The World has no place for suffering because it is passing away. Every day the glory of the World diminishes a bit more. And suffering reminds the World of its temporality. But Christ is eternal and through sufferings, made full in his body the church, has overcome the world.