

Seventh Sunday of Easter – Epistle

Rejoicing In The Sufferings Of Christ

1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11

Seventh Sunday of Easter

Analysis by Steven C. Kuhl

12Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange is happening to you. 13But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed. 14If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you.

5:6Humble yourselves, therefore under the might hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. 7Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering. And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

Diagnosis: The Time Has Come For Judgment (4:17)

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – *Surprised by the Fiery Ordeal (4:12)*

Peter writes to a community that is immersed in what he calls a “fiery ordeal.” They are experiencing persecution, discrimination, ridicule—not necessarily because they have done anything wrong (i.e., “crimes,” 4:15), but because they are trying to live as faithful followers of Jesus Christ. What makes this situation problematic, however, is not the “fiery ordeal” itself, but that these Christians are “surprised” that such an ordeal could happen to them. How could these Christians not have understood that the “world,” the wider culture, would take offense at their Christ and their faith in him? After all, this world crucified him. But then are we any different? Notice how even we Christians today often assume a nice, neat, seamless connection between faith in Christ and life in the world—and how “surprised” we are when the world says “No” to us, not because we are so different “culturally,” but because we are so different “spiritually,” because the “Spirit of God . . . is resting on you” (4:14).

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – *Anxiety (5:6) as Ignoring the Sufferings of Christ*

This “surprise” at the surrounding culture’s rejection of them, however, gives rise to more than just benign information about how Christians and culture may clash. Peter is aware that this ordeal gives rise, not only to “surprise,” but to a deep-seated “anxiety” (5:7) on the part of the Christian about their Christ. They are losing faith. For in this “ordeal” these Asia Minor Christians are facing more than the flesh and blood opposition of their particular culture. They are facing the “devil” himself, that “roaring lion,” who has but one goal: to strip them of their faith (cf. 5:9). They are facing not only local persecution, but cosmic persecution: an anxiety inducing

suffering that Christians face worldwide. The devil is most cunning in the way he does that! He does it by subtly diverting their/our attention away from the sufferings of Christ to the miserable state of their/our life and the pleasures of this world—that is, to the promise of a glory without suffering.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – *Disgraced in the Time of Judgment*

The danger in the diversion is not, unfortunately, spelled out in the verses given us by those who selected this pericope. It is spelled out in the verses that are cut out, 4:15-19. Whether the wider culture knows it or not (these Christians should have known it, but they seem to have forgotten) the present time is not benign: It is a time of judgment for everyone (4:17). These Christians' forgetfulness (which is manifest in their surprise and anxiety) is dangerous because it leaves them "disgracefully" alone in their suffering. That is, it leaves them with no share in the sufferings of Christ, the suffering that actually is destined for glory. When the time of judgment comes to a close they will have fared no better than the world. They will have suffered in vain—disgracefully.

Prognosis: Sharing the Sufferings of Christ

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – *The Sufferings of Christ and the Glory Revealed*

No one, Peter reminds us, escapes the judgment of God, neither those of the household of faith nor the "ungodly and sinners." Judgment, suffering—those are givens. But there is One who has already suffered through that judgment to a "surprising" glory—and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. To be sure, on the cross he suffered the disgraceful death of a sinner, of a murderer, of thief, of a criminal, of a mischief-maker (cf. 4:15). He did not escape judgment and shame. After all, that is what the cross was for—shaming sinners to death. And yet, his

cross, his suffering, his disgrace was different. His suffering and death, says Peter, turns out in the end not to be disgraceful at all, but glorious. Of course, no one could see that at the time. God needed to reveal it as such, which God did in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead (1:3). But that only begs the question all the more: What makes his suffering glorious? Answering that, too, is surprising. It's because "he cares for you" (5:7). And what care it is! His care is such that his suffering was undertaken not because of what he did (i.e., sins he committed), but because of what we did (i.e., sins we committed), and God counted that suffering on his part as glorious. In Christ, the God who is busy judging the present world has surprisingly become the "God of all grace" (5:10). In Christ, the God who judges the world in righteousness has found a way to "restore, support, strengthen, and establish" sinners to his grace (5:10). We call it "the gospel of God" (4:17).

Step 5: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Solution) – *Casting our anxiety on him (5:7); remaining "steadfast in faith" (5:9)*

Connecting us to that grace and keeping us connected—that is Peter's concern for his hearers then as well as now. To that end, therefore, he bids "cast your anxiety on Christ" (5:7), remain "steadfast in your faith" (5:9). Faith, according to Peter, is not about avoiding or escaping suffering. Rather, faith is about adding to our sufferings. That is, faith is about adding to our sufferings the sufferings of Christ. Faith, therefore, connects us to Christ, first of all, in his sufferings. Now to the world such faith sounds like adding insult to injury. After all, Christ's sufferings are very insulting. And isn't the fury of the fiery ordeal stoked by the world's insults? Still, there is more to this faith than first meets the eye. Because faith in Christ so thoroughly shares in the sufferings of Christ, that same faith also carries within it the added advantage of sharing, equally as thoroughly, in the

outcome of his sufferings: the glory of the resurrection, the grace and favor of God. No wonder the devil, that roaring lion, is so eager to rob us of our faith. How frustrated he must be when he cannot.

Step 6: Final Diagnosis (External Solution) – *Rejoice insofar as You Are Sharing the Sufferings of Christ*

By this faith a new stance on life emerges for the Christian. No longer, says Peter, will Christians be surprised when suffering comes, but they will rejoice. Not because misery loves company, but because they share in the sufferings of Christ, and so they “suffer in accordance with the will of God” (4:19). Out of this new stance on life comes the strength to “continue to do good” (4:19) regardless of what the culture may think, say or do. Won’t their/our neighbors—the wider culture and the world—be surprised when they see how joyfully Christians suffer for the Christ in whom they believe and for the ones for whom their Christ suffered? Who knows? Maybe that joy will be just enough of a glimpse of the glory to come that even those neighbors will want a share in the sufferings of Christ. We can certainly hope!