

# Sixth Sunday of Easter, Epistle, Year A

BLESSED SUFFERING

1 Peter 3:13-22

Sixth Sunday of Easter

Analysis by Bill White

13 Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? 14 But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, 15 but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; 16 yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. 17 For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil. 18 For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, 19 in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, 20 who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. 21 And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

DIAGNOSIS: Suffering for Doing Good

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Suffering for

## Christ's Sake

The Jewish and Gentile Christians to whom Peter writes are experiencing significant persecution because they are “doing what is right” for Christ’s sake. Many have become discouraged and confused by their suffering. They see themselves as moral and ethical people being dealt with in an unjust manner.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Why are we suffering?

Their circumstances beg the question: “Why are these bad things happening to us good people?” Of course, this is part of the problem because, properly understood, there are no good people. But most people judge themselves as good. Peter knows this and he knows this thinking combined with this kind of suffering will tempt many to abandon faith in Jesus Christ. Placing their faith instead in their own human logic and reasoning they may self-righteously conclude, “If Christ and the Christian gospel were really true we would not be suffering like this! We are suffering unjustly. Therefore, this Christian religion must not be true.”

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Abandoning the Faith  
Even worse, Peter knows that if they give in to this kind of temptation, if they abandon faith in Christ because of their suffering, there will come a day when God will abandon them.

## PROGNOSIS: Righteous Endurance

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Christ Suffered for Us

Hence, Peter writes to teach them and encourage them. There is Good News for those who are suffering because they trust and follow Jesus Christ. There is hope, encouragement, and power to persevere from Christ himself who knows our suffering, for he himself suffered on the cross for righteousness’ sake. In and

through Christ, Almighty God has executed the “sweet swap,” that is, the happy exchange of the Righteous Man dying for unrighteous human beings. As Peter proclaims, “For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit” (v. 18).

#### Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Faith to Endure Suffering

What is more, Christ did this “in order to bring you to God” (v. 18b). This help, this power to continue to do what is right even when doing so brings suffering, is available to you and me! This “sweet swap,” God exchanging Christ’s righteousness for our unrighteousness, comes by the power of the Holy Spirit working God’s free gift of faith in Christ within us in exchange for our misplaced faith. This is the faith into which we were baptized (see Romans 6). This living faith in Christ “saves” us from the temptation to abandon Christianity because we can no longer endure suffering for righteousness sake. “And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him” (vv. 21-22).

#### Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Empowered Witness

Better still, not only does the Holy Spirit enable us to keep the faith during periods of suffering for Christ’s sake, but the Holy Spirit also empowers us to continue to do good in Christ’s name while suffering, AND to bear witness to the faith, hope and love we have in Christ. This is indeed a blessing from God! “Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct

in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil" (vv. 15b-17).