

## REFLECTIONS ON PERSECUTION AND SUFFERING

The readings these past 3 days have been consistent in talking about persecution and suffering. These are God's words to us. They direct our path.

June 6 – 2 Tim 3:12 “In fact, all who want to live religiously in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”

June 5 – 2 Tim 2:8-9 “such is my gospel, for which I am suffering, even to the point of chains, like a criminal.”

June 4 – 2 Tim 1:8,12 “bear your share of hardship for the gospel with the strength that comes from God. .... On this account I am suffering these things”

Suffering and carrying the cross are the ways of a true disciple.

What are some of these sufferings? The fulltimers who resigned/retired from CFC-GK are not being given their benefits (for some it will be almost a year already), and are in dire need, for daily sustenance and for coming education expenses. Our intercessors are being viciously attacked spiritually, to the point of physical suffering. Our seniors throughout the world are being maligned and attacked personally. GK beneficiaries who align with us are being threatened. A brother was even ousted from the golf committee!

There is no let-up, and in fact the attacks are intensifying. Look at their blogs (I myself do not, but hear about their content), their anonymous emails, the newspaper attacks, the continuing disinformation (quoting even the Vatican out of context).

Lamentations continues!

What is God doing? **God is forming us in order to prepare us for the glorious years ahead.**

**This is a time of purification. SO REJOICE!** The extent and the intensity of the persecution and our suffering are directly proportional to the glory that God intends to accomplish in and through His holy remnant.

God is teaching us and forming us. We should not focus on crying out for relief or for His judgment on those who persecute us, but we should be entering more deeply into understanding His ways and allowing these to be embedded deeply within our very being.

June 5 – Ps 25:4-5 “Make known to me your ways, Lord; teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me”

June 6 – Ps 119:157,159-160 “Though my persecutors and foes are many I do not turn from your decrees. .... See how I love your precepts, Lord; in your kindness give me life. Your every word is enduring; all your just edicts are forever.”

So what are these continuing and intensifying persecutions all about?

First, they help purify us. **So praise God for this great way to grow in holiness.** Without such trials and crosses, we would not be as holy.

June 4 – 2 Tim 1:9 “He saved us and called us to a holy life, not according to our works but according to his own design and the grace bestowed on us in Christ Jesus before time began”

Second, they teach us, in a painful but blessed way, how we are to be as Christians (pain is inherent in the process of purification). They prepare us for our relationships (with God, with brethren, with others) for the work of the future. Given what we are enduring, we must learn not to fall into such sins ourselves.

- Do not lie. This will include such things as half-truths and distortions (such as reporting only the good and hiding the bad).
- Do not just speak about love but actually love. Do we still harbor grudges against each other? Are we unable to forgive? Do we look down on others? Do we look to the interest of our brethren first and foremost? Are there brethren we have not fully accepted with the love of the Lord?
- Do not be tampuhin (onion-skinned). This is a sign of great immaturity. This shows we do not have the heart of a servant.
- Look to serving God and not man. We look beyond the shortcomings of those over us. As we do so, we see Christ, who is the one we are actually serving.
- Do not malign others. But speak the truth in righteousness. It is the truth that sets people free. But let your speech be gracious.
- Love your enemy. It is God who will judge them. Pray that they will be converted so that they will not be judged harshly.
- Be at peace with all.

Third, God is giving us the privilege to be directly invested. There is no other way to truly transform us. We know all about suffering and crosses, but this cannot just be a vicarious experience. Unless we ourselves experience them in a personal, concrete and significant way, the impact on our lives is limited. God loves us so much and is preparing us for so great a future that He is prolonging and allowing the intensification of our suffering.

So what do we do?

**First, and again, REJOICE!** We are worthy to suffer even just a little bit of what Jesus suffered—false accusation, betrayal, abandonment, insults, ridicule, painful blows, hatred. The fruit of such little suffering will be tremendous and awesome.

**Second, continue to learn the lessons of Lamentations.** This is not just for 2007, but forever. At least once every year, preferably during Lent, read and meditate on the book *40 Days of Lamentations*. Look to suffering and pain and the cross as God’s blessings (if we have not acted unrighteously). Meditate on the very many passages in the Bible that speak of this (Mt 5:10-12; Acts Acts 5:41; Acts 14:22; Jas 1:2-4; 1 Pt 1:6-7; 1 Pt 2:19-21;

1 Pt 4:12-19; 2 Cor 1:3-7; 2 Cor 6:3-10; 2 Cor 12:9-10; Phil 2:5-8; Col 1:24; Heb 12:1-13; many others). But always remember, Lamentations is about hope and joy.

**Third, let go and let God.** Many times this will entail not just a spiritual assent, but actual physical or material loss. For example, while the fulltimers should fight for what is legally and morally due to them, they should not be focused on the money (no matter how great their need) and even at some point be willing to suffer material loss as they go about the Lord's work. Let go of money, of reputation, of employment, of friends (because of them, not because of us), even of golf. But in all things, be blameless. And trust in God.

**Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus.**

June 4 – Ps 123:1-2 “To you I raise my eyes, to you enthroned in heaven. . . . so are our eyes on the Lord our God, till we are shown favor.”

**Let us continue to recognize our own sinfulness and look to God's mercy.** Let us always consider the plank in our own eye and not the splinter in others. **Let us humble ourselves,** and allow the Lord to raise us up.

June 5 – Ps 25:8-9,11 “Good and upright is the Lord, who shows sinners the way, guides the humble rightly, and teaches the humble the way. . . . For the sake of your name, Lord, pardon my guilt, though it is great.”

**Let us follow Jesus' (and Paul's) teaching, with all that these entail.**

June 6 – 2 Tim 3:10-11 “You have followed my teaching, way of life, purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, and sufferings”

June 5 – Ps 25:14 “The counsel of the Lord belongs to the faithful; the covenant instructs them.”

**Let us continue to put our faith, trust and hope in God.**

June 6 – 2 Tim 3:11 “Yet from all these things the Lord delivered me.”

June 5 – Ps 25:6-7 “Remember your compassion and love, O Lord; for they are ages old. Remember no more the sins of my youth; remember me only in light of your love.”

**Let us remain faithful to God, to His ways, and to our covenant.** Let us fear the Lord in His awesome majesty. This is the way to being blessed.

June 6 – 2 Tim 3:14 “But you, remain faithful to what you have learned and believed”

June 5 – Ps 25:12-13 “Who are those who fear the Lord? God shows them the way to choose. They live well and prosper, and their descendants inherit the land.”

**Let us rejoice, for the victory, in God's time and in God's way, is at hand.**

God console, sustain, strengthen, and bless you all.

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