

In the name ✠ of Jesus. Amen. The title for today's message is "The Holy Spirit interceding", based on the Epistle reading, from Romans chapter 8. Let us pray...Amen.

We live in one of, if not, the best country in the world. On top of that, this is also one of the safest locations in this country and province, and still there are people who suffer. While this province and area produces more food than we could ever eat, people around us still daily go hungry in our province and community. While this is an incredibly safe area, there are still people around us who daily face real threats. While we have a world class health care system, and free and open access to that world class healthcare system, people around us still suffer with illnesses--both physical and mental, and with weaknesses, and people we know regularly die. Suffering people are not just those faceless and nameless people we don't know, or care to know: they are our family members, our friends, our neighbours, and ourselves. Suffering is universal condition across all creation.

Suffering is a daily reality. For some it is worse than for others. Today's Epistle text compares suffering to childbirth, and while since the Fall women do suffer while trying to birth their children, all people suffer in different ways.

As Christians who care about those around us who are suffering, and wanting to help, often one way in which we help is by praying to the Triune God: to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, to help those, or ourselves, when suffering.

Still, there are times when it is difficult to know even what to pray. Paul discusses this in today's Epistle text: in his letter to the Romans. Several years ago I had a friend named Jordan from church who was in the late, and final stages of spinal cancer. A few years earlier he had several tumors removed and the cancer seemed to have gone into remission, but then it came back with a vengeance. Now Jordan was in his early thirties and had four kids, each was just a little older than mine. He was active with his family, with youth, and with most things in the church. Still, when the cancer came back it was aggressive and he suffered. The physical scars from the first battle, including the partial paralysis of half his face and the loss of hearing on one side, were physically obvious. In the second round he suffered worse. And it wasn't just him. It was his wife and it was his children who also suffered.

Now, before Bible study one Sunday we who gathered prayed for those in the congregation needing prayers. It was interesting to hear the person leading the Bible study stop and say: "I don't know what to pray for, for Jordan. We all want him to be healed, but his suffering is intense. Lord, into Your hands we commend him and trust You." *[Pause]*

For at the end of the day, and even more at the end of life, there is only one place you can go for comfort, help, and care: Jesus Christ. He gives you the gift of faith through His Word and so you no longer "**walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.**"(Romans 8:4) You walk by faith trusting God and His promises.

For Faith does not rescue you from suffering. To the contrary, faith comes through suffering, since our Lord reveals Himself most clearly in suffering and the cross. In the verse immediately prior to today's Epistle reading, St. Paul writes, "**The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.**" (*Romans 8:17*) We become heirs of God with Christ through suffering.

But that suffering has an end. Suffering has a purpose. Suffering points us to glory. In this context, glory is the revelation of who we are in Christ. At the present time, all of the promises of the Gospel are hidden realities. Glory hidden under suffering; saint hidden under sinner. But soon what has been hidden will be revealed.

"The sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing to the glory that is to be revealed to us." (*Romans 8:18*) When you are in the midst of suffering, every pain, every wound is amplified. Time stretches so you think your suffering will never end. But when it does end, you look back on it as a slight, momentary affliction—only a flash in your memory.

So it is with this present life in the world. It is a life of suffering. Faith does not rescue you from suffering. But faith in the promises of Christ sustain you in your suffering and propel you to its end.

What is the end, the goal of suffering? "**We ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.**" (*Romans 8:23*) [Pause] 'The redemption of our bodies' is Paul's way of saying the 'resurrection of the body'. It is the new creation. Like a woman in labour, the sufferings of this life are the necessary pains of giving birth. But as a woman's labour ends in the appearance of a new life, so also the sufferings of this present time evaporate in the revelation of the resurrection.

And so, in the mean time **as** we patiently wait for Jesus' return, the Holy Spirit intercedes to help us in this life of sorrows (*LP, 7th Petition*). The Holy Spirit works through our hearing of God's Word and receiving the His Sacraments to bring us Jesus' blood-bought gifts of faith, forgiveness, and eternal life. The Holy Spirit also works through our hearing of God's Word and receiving the Sacrament to strengthen our faith and trust in God so we can face the adversities and the sufferings of this life, and to help carry those around us. For the church is not a country club, but rather a field hospital at the front line of a fierce battle.

When we struggle to find the words to pray, and/or don't know what to pray, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us and pray through us for what we ought, even when we don't know what that might be. The Holy Spirit not only helps us in our weakness, He also helps us through our weaknesses. Because we "**cannot by our own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ our Lord or come to Him, the Holy Spirit calls us by the Gospel, enlightens us with His gifts, sanctifies and keeps us in the true faith, just as He does with the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.**" (*Explanation of the 3rd Article, SC*)

In short, the Holy Spirit points us to find our comfort in the **wounds** of Jesus. Going back a few chapters in Paul's letter to the Romans, Paul said this in reference to faith and suffering:

“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. More than that, 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 out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”(Romans 5:1-5)

In our times of suffering and weakness, the Holy Spirit points us back to Jesus, to His suffering on the cross, and also to His resurrection. The Holy Spirit points us through our suffering to the One who knows our suffering—to Jesus Christ—and to His taking of our suffering and standing in our place. The Holy Spirit works in spite of our weakness, and very well through our weaknesses. Instead of pointing to our strengths, Paul tells the Corinthians, **“I will boast all the more of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”**(2 Corinthians 12:9b-10) Paul rejoiced in his weaknesses and in his sufferings, just as we can, for Paul knew his Saviour and trusted His promises.

As for Jordan, we prayed for him during that Bible study, and many more times. The members and congregation prayed for the Lord to watch over him and his family. Some prayed he would be healed. And our prayers were perfectly answered. [Pause] He now rejoices with Jesus and all the saints in heaven while his body is asleep in the ground. For in death, God perfectly healed him. In death, God gave Jordan the victory over the cancer which ravaged his body, and eternal ready from his suffering. For now cancer will never ever touch him again. Sin will never touch him again. Even death has no hold of him for Jordan is now at peace in Christ and joyfully looking forward to the resurrection of all flesh. At that time his body and soul will be reunited for eternity.

The Lord loves to answer prayers, and He gives hope even in the midst of the worst suffering. Yet, He does not point you to yourselves, your choices, your commitments, or your works. Instead, God's Word and the Holy Spirit point you to Jesus, to the waters of Baptism, to the words of absolution, and to the Lord's Supper, all pointing to Jesus' suffering for you and for your sins on the cross—and culminating in the proclamation: **“It is finished!”**(John 19:30) and **"He is risen"**(Matt 28:6) For your sin is finished. Your suffering and your weaknesses will be finished, just not yet. **“For in this hope we are saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hope for what he sees? For if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”**(Romans 8:24-27) God's will is to save you, and in Christ Jesus, by grace through faith in Him, you are. In the name of Jesus. Amen