

Rev. Derek Fairman

Good Friday (Suffering)

This day we can remember the Book of Lamentations. This book was written about the destruction of Jerusalem, and the suffering that it caused to the Chosen People. We might be familiar with some of the passages: “Come, all who pass by the way, / pay attention and see: / Is there any pain like my pain, / which has been ruthlessly inflicted upon me, / With which the Lord has tormented me / on the day of His blazing wrath? (1:12).” Or again, “To what can I compare you – to what can I liken you - / O Daughter Jerusalem? / What example can I give to comfort you, / virgin Daughter Zion? / For your breach is vast as the sea; / who could heal you? (2:13).” “My eyes stream with tears over the destruction / of the daughter of my people (3:48).” There is the prophecy concerning the Lord Jesus, “I am one who has known affliction / under the rod of God’s anger, / one whom he has driven and forced to walk / in darkness, not in light... (3:1-2).”

The ancient city of Jerusalem was destroyed because of the sins of the people. The Lord allowed the city to be destroyed, and the people suffered. The prophet Isaiah explained that the people had suffered double for their sins, meaning that the people were punished for their sins, but that the suffering they endured went beyond what was necessary, and the Babylonians would answer for their excess (Isaiah 40:2). Even though it may have been justly deserved, there was still cause to lament the destruction of the beautiful city. Those who were faithful to the Lord still lost the beauty of the city, because of the sins of the many.

The Virgin Mary suffered. She did nothing wrong to deserve the suffering she endured, but she still suffered. She suffered because she chose to associate herself with her Son. When the Lord was arrested, her heart went with Him. When He was tortured, she endured that torture with Him, in a mysterious way that mothers share in the pain of their children. When He was mocked, she endured the mockery with Him. When He was forced to carry the Cross, she felt the burden of the sin of the world. When He made His Sacrifice, her heart was united with Him.

Unlike the Apostles and others who fled, who had some former life or self-reliance to fall back upon, the Virgin Mary had only her Son. When the Lord Jesus poured Himself out in love, she poured herself out. When the Lord flung Himself into the depths of suffering and Sacrifice, she went with Him the whole way. There was no mitigation to temper the fire of love and Sacrifice. She entered the depths of that fire.

The Virgin Mary, the true Daughter Zion, suffered. The Lord did not forget the suffering she endured that day, the way in which she entered the most intense part of the fire of love. She might remind us of Moses, who entered the fiery cloud on Mt. Sinai. She might remind us of the three young men who entered the fiery furnace in Babylon, who emerged unscathed. She might remind us of the mother of the seven sons recorded in the Book of Maccabees, who died and watched her sons die for refusing to disobey God's command.

The Virgin Mary suffered, but she did not waver in her faith. She did not break. Unlike the ancient city of Jerusalem, she could bear the Lord's presence within her. She could bear the fire that burned within the Heart of the Lord Jesus, and which burned within her Immaculate Heart. The enemies of the Lord Jesus tried to put that fire out. They poured the most water imaginable on that fire.

Yet there was always hope. The embers still burned. Even amid the destruction of the city, the Book of Lamentations still professed hope for the future: "But this I will call to mind; / Therefore I will hope: / The Lord's acts of mercy are not exhausted, / his compassion is not spent; / They are renewed each morning / – great is your faithfulness! (3:21-23)" The destruction of the city was not the end; the people would rebuild.

The Song of Songs puts it thus: "Deep waters cannot quench love, / nor rivers sweep it away (Songs 8:7)." The fire of God's love would leap back into flame on the third day, not seeking revenge but bringing mercy and forgiveness. The Lord had restoration in mind for the city of Jerusalem, and the Lord would rebuild what had seemed to be lost on Good Friday. For the Virgin Mary, she would have her Son restored to her. For all others, their sins, their betrayal of the Lord Jesus, their fears, and doubts, would begin to disappear in the Resurrection. They would find the Lord Jesus again in the Resurrection, but much more.

We can be afraid of the fire of divine love. We can be afraid of getting burned whenever we approach that mystery of God's love. We can be afraid of the sacrifices asked of us. There are many reasons for us to be afraid to draw close to the Cross, but the Virgin Mary is ready to take us by the hand to draw us into the mystery of suffering and Sacrifice. She went fully into that suffering, and not only did she avoid getting burned, she came out changed for the better. As we approach the altar this day, we ask the Lord to let go of fear, to let go of doubts, and to allow the Lord to teach us that there is nothing to fear whenever we draw closer to Him.