

Giving up 10 minutes for reading the Bible during Lent

Do you really believe that God is good all the time and that He loves you all the time?

If you are reading a chapter a day from Acts of the Apostles followed by a chapter a day from St Paul's letter to the Romans you will get to Chapter 5 on Monday 30th. This is a reflection on verses 1 to 11 – those verses are here below (in New Revised Standard Version Anglicised Catholic Edition) in another translation at the end of the reflection:

Chapter 5 ¹Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. ³ And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. ⁸ But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. ⁹ Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰ For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. ¹¹ But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Do you find it easy to always believe your Heavenly Father loves you? When we go through times of difficulty in our family, in our church or with our friends or face serious health or other issue we can easily start to doubt and ask “Does God really love me?” “Can I really count on Him?” Is God truly good?” “Aren't I too messed up?” “Will my doubts mean He'll stop loving me?” In this passage from St Paul's letter to the church in Rome he gives them, and therefore us, answers to doubts:

- ◆ God is at peace with us (verse 1). Our sin no longer separates us from Him because we are “justified” through what Jesus accomplished by dying on the cross and being raised to life again. He not only dealt with our sin so that we are completely forgiven but also gave us His righteousness (He lived the perfect life that no human being could ever live). Therefore God can remain our loving heavenly Father because in His sight we have a record of perfect obedience (that's what it means to be justified – we have Jesus' righteousness).
- ◆ Because of this we know we are loved. Therefore we can be sure that our sufferings are not due to His anger with us but that sufferings are at work in us to produce endurance, character and hope (verses 4-5) because through our sufferings we taste His love which we know through the Holy Spirit at work in us.
- ◆ Our sufferings are given to us for the express purpose of deepening our faith in Him, burning the dross away from our lives to reveal the pure gold within (Isaiah 1:22 and 1st letter of St Peter 1:6-7). He is preparing us for eternal life with Him in heaven when we will be gloriously perfect.

- ◆ In verses 6-10 St Paul describes the sort of people God loves to save:
 - i) Weak and ungodly (verse 6)
 - ii) Sinners (verse 8)
 - iii) Enemies who deserved His wrath (His just and right anger) (verses 9-10)
 - iv) Those who made it necessary for His Son to die (verse 10)

St Paul was blunt. He was not concerned that we might be upset by what he says. He knew he had good news, but we had to hear the bad news (chapters 1 to 4 outline the bad news – re-read them and make a note of those that apply to us) so we could really rejoice in God restoring our relationship with Him.

Read verses 1 to 11 again and answer the following questions:

- ◆ What does St Paul say gives you peace with God? Why would you not have peace with God (hint – look at chapters 1-4)?
- ◆ Why does God allow suffering in your life? Does this mean He is punishing you? How can you know for sure that God loves you?
- ◆ How does St Paul describe those whom God loves? Do you see yourself as that bad a person?
- ◆ What does it mean for you when St Paul says you are “reconciled to God”? (St Paul’s writing can be hard to understand sometimes – try the alternative translation at the end of this reflection if that helps)
- ◆ How can you know that you are saved from the consequences of your sin and so destined for heaven, to be with Him eternally? What has God done to ensure that your destiny is secure? (Hint: when you read St Paul’s letter to the Romans Chapter 8 verses 28 to 39 in a few days’ time then you’ll grasp it)

When you doubt God’s love for you during times of suffering remember:

You will always struggle with doubt if you think that God’s love is based on anything you do – because if it was, you would never be sure if you have done enough for Him to love you.

Because of “justification” it means that God has promised to be your loving, heavenly Father always – no matter what you do, or say or think. That thought should trigger joyous love for Him that means you want to live your life for Him and please Him out of gratitude (not doing things to try to earn His love nor taking His love for granted)

If you are struggling with suffering try reading C.S. Lewis’s book “The problem of pain”.

“Suffering is not a question which demands an answer, nor is it a problem which requires a solution. It is a mystery which demands a presence” - Professor John Wyatt in “Matters of life and death”. Suffering draws our focus of our attention towards what Jesus went through on the cross because of His love for us. Suffering is a call to stand together in community, to be there with us in our suffering; the presence of people who prepared to stay with us in our suffering, who will minister God’s presence to us, will help to deepen our faith in those times of suffering. Isaiah 43: 2-5 reminds us God will be with us in the toughest times.

Alternative translation of St Paul's letter to the Romans Chapter 5 Verses 1 to 11

5 ¹We have been made right with God because of our faith. So we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ²Through our faith, Christ has brought us into that blessing of God's grace that we now enjoy. And we are very happy because of the hope we have of sharing God's glory. ³And we are also happy with the troubles we have. Why are we happy with troubles? Because we know that these troubles make us more patient. ⁴And this patience is proof that we are strong. And this proof gives us hope. ⁵And this hope will never disappoint us. We know this because God has poured out his love to fill our hearts through the Holy Spirit he gave us.

⁶Christ died for us when we were unable to help ourselves. We were living against God, but at just the right time Christ died for us. ⁷Very few people will die to save the life of someone else, even if it is for a good person. Someone might be willing to die for an especially good person. ⁸But Christ died for us while we were still sinners, and by this God showed how much he loves us.

⁹We have been made right with God by the blood sacrifice of Christ. So through Christ we will surely be saved from God's anger. ¹⁰I mean that while we were God's enemies, he made friends with us through his Son's death. And the fact that we are now God's friends makes it even more certain that he will save us through his Son's life. ¹¹And not only will we be saved, but we also rejoice right now in what God has done for us through our Lord Jesus Christ. It is because of Jesus that we are now God's friends.