

Tribulation in the World. Peace in Jesus.

What an awful promise. Brothers and sisters in Christ, I'm sorry that you had to hear this from our Lord today. You're going to have tribulations. Why didn't He just say "You think your faith is steady and life is good? Just wait and see how bad it's going to get. Troubles are on their way—that I promise you." He doesn't sound quite as welcoming and comforting as we're used to.

But this *is* a promise. It's more than a warning of things that might come if we go down a certain path or if life plays out a certain way. It's more than a prediction of things He thinks is going to happen. It is a promise of things that Christ knows are going to happen. And you know, looking around the world and the neighbourhood, Christ wasn't lying. Tribulation has been with the Christian Church in every age. It's been in your life; it has been in mine.

I would say there are three types of tribulation that plague Christians.

The first way that tribulation finds us, and this is the one Christ was immediately warning the disciples of in our reading, is when the Christian church is attacked and lives end up at risk because of our connection with Christ. The disciples all fled, choosing to protect their own skin rather than be associated with Christ. He walked to the cross alone, loved and cherished by the Father alone. His followers were not willing to die in association with Christ. Not yet at least.

Later on in their lives, as their faith was restored and continually strengthened, nearly all of them were martyred for the sake of Christ. And the continues to happen in the church around the world today. We might say we're persecuted here in the west because it's not as easy to be a Christian as it once was. We are not as strong of a majority, people don't often share our views, and sometimes we get called out for being too mean or old-fashioned. Yet what we are losing here, our power and our privilege, is nothing compared to those around the world who are dying for their faith. They are enduring what Christ warns us of, and the only reason they don't forsake Him in their time of need is

because He is holding them. This is certainly the most obvious tribulation Christians receive for bearing His name.

The second way tribulation comes to us is in the battle against sin. While much less in-your-face than being killed for being a Christian, it is much more common. Temptation to sin arises continually in all our lives, and as Christians we fight. We pray that we would be saved from it, we resist it, and when we fall into it, we repent of it. This dreadful cycle is the life of a Christian until the day we die; this is our lot in life as the old Adam and the new man in Christ fight within us. This is enough to drive a person crazy as dueling desires pop up inside of us and as the one we wish was dead too often wins.

This is a tribulation that aims to weaken us and get us to throw in the towel. After all if the new man weren't desiring Christ's righteousness we'd be content with being a "good person" in the eyes of the world, more righteous than the majority according to our own perspective. We certainly wouldn't be as tormented by sin if we would give up on the true standard of our God and instead just enjoy the sin. Unfortunately, for Christians this tribulation continues with us until we die.

The third way tribulation enters our lives is the pain and suffering that happens world round, to everyone despite their faith. Brains, hearts, and backs failing, families falling apart, wars breaking out, natural disasters displacing people and destroying property, financial crises and bad weather and lost jobs, plus whatever you are going through this day, this week, this month. These are not particular to the Church, yet we are certainly not immune to them just because we darken the doorposts of a church and have faith. The same brokenness that tortures every individual comes to us; and I believe this pain, this torment that pops up randomly and seems to have no end, this can be so dangerous to our faith because to our eyes it looks like God has ceased to hold us; maybe Christ has failed us and this is all futile. Then we would be left all alone in our tribulations.

Jesus tells of these tribulations to the disciples just before, by all accounts of sight, He is about to lose and they are about to scatter. He lets the disciples know that trouble is on the near horizon so they

aren't caught off guard, so that they don't think that Jesus' life was all in vain and decide to place their trust in some other way.

Jesus knows, even as He is making these grand promises to them of the salvation He is winning and of the privilege of talking straight to the Father, Jesus knows that they are all going to leave Him. Their understanding which they think is so strong at this point, the faith that they finally think they understand, the love they think they finally possess, all of it is going to disappear at the tribulation which is hours away. But Jesus still promises these wonderful things to them—forgiveness, access to the Father, an end to all this pain. These promises are theirs to hold onto even when Jesus knows that they are going to throw their hands up in defeat. Even amidst all the seemingly overwhelming suffering His followers experience, He holds them through it all—His promises remain.

You see, none of these tribulations are a surprise to Jesus. Our weakness of faith isn't either. It's not as though He did something wrong and forgot to get rid of some of the pain or He failed to give us faith that is strong enough to get through the worst of days. No. He said that these tribulations are coming and you aren't always going to be strong enough.

"But take heart. Take courage. Listen up. I have overcome the world." The temptations that you suffer through are not a sign that you aren't really a Christian—or that you aren't Christian enough. The pain that you feel in your back or the doubt that arises in your brain, these aren't signs that Christ failed or has abandoned you. The deaths of Christians all around the world does not mean that Christ is not strong enough to protect us. In all these moments, which satan would love to use to instill fear and doubt in your heart and mind, Christ invites you to turn to Him and receive His promises and cling to them. And in return cry out to Him in all situations. He has overcome the world and all the sin and pain and evil that exists in it and even in the midst of it all, He hears you. Believe it.

On the cross, Christ suffered all the senseless suffering that we feel we endure in our day to day lives. For if anyone deserved to be punished for sins and to suffer the brokenness of the world caused by

sin, it wasn't Him. All His pain was purely nonsensical and undeserved, and yet He took it for us. He took upon Himself our sin and our doubt, our suffering and our tribulation, so that it would not be ours.

So that today, when we suffer in any way, we suffer as a part of His body, not alone but instead one with Him who overcame. As we endure the chaos of the world and the temptation that is common to all of us, we who have been baptized into Christ's death and resurrection, we endure because He endured.

And we endure, trusting that the end, the perfect paradise, the New Jerusalem that St. John paints for us in our reading today, that is assured for us. This around us is not as good as it gets, but instead one day, when our faith is made sight, we will know only His righteousness and love, the perfection of the new creation which hasn't been marred by sin and where pain and death and suffering don't even exist.

Until then, amidst your worldly tribulations, turn to Him who has conquered this world. Here, in this fact, here in His life and His death and His resurrection, here where your sin is destroyed and death has come to its end, here in Christ the suffering of the world has met its match, and here in His Word He forgives you and revives you and carries you. Until that day when you experience all this in its fullness, He is the one who holds you and hears you. He has you until we experience life everlasting with Him. Truly, though we will have tribulation in this world, He *has* overcome the world. It is finished. This salvation is His ultimate promise to you.

Amen.