

Reading: Acts 7:54-60

***“Rejoice, in as much as you are partakers of Christ’s sufferings”  
(1 Pet 4:13)***

Sufferings in life normally develop grumbling in the lips and bitterness in the heart. Sometimes they seal the grieving sufferer’s mouth in dead silence. But facing those sufferings courageously and embracing them cheerfully would transform suffering into worship (Acts 5:41).

Accepting injustice and ill-treatment patiently and pleasantly is worship. Hear Peter in 1 Peter 4:14-16, “If any one suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.” If those who crucified Jesus would brag that they had murdered Him, Jesus would say that He had offered Himself “as a pleasant aromatic sacrifice to God.” Yes, Jesus offered Himself at His own free will. It was a voluntary sacrifice!

Every stone pelted at us can become a bowl of incense offered to God provided we do not retaliate or murmur (Acts 6:12,15). When Stephen died as a martyr, he endured suffering in the spirit of worship. His angelic face; open heavens; vision of the glory of God; Jesus standing up to pay tribute to the first martyr of the Church; a sweet martyrdom entwined with forgiveness to his killers!

Now let us peep into Heaven to see the multitude of white-robed worshippers. Who are these beautiful people? “They are the ones who came out of great tribulations! .... They are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple” (Rev 7:9-15).

Going through the list of the heroes of faith we find on one side those who had done exemplary valorous deeds (Heb 11:33-37); on the other side we meet those who, expecting a glorious resurrection, embraced torturous deaths. Blessed are those who accept brickbats thrown at them as bouquet showered on God! Watchman Nee (1903-1972) in China was arrested and persecuted for his faith in the Gospel. Even when death was at the threshold, he refused to renounce his faith. All these men and women built sanctuaries with the stones pelted at them!



*Praise Him for the trials sent as cords of love,  
Binding us more closely to the things above;  
For the faith that conquers, hope, that naught can dim,  
For the land where loved ones gather unto Him! (E.E. Hewitt, 1851-1920)*

Gracious Heavenly Father, we worship You as the God of Glory. Everything about You is glorious. Your dwelling place is glorious. It's an unapproachable light. You are the King of Glory. Your voice is glorious over waters. Your glory covers the heavens, and the earth is full of Your praise. The heavens declare Your glory. You have revealed Your glory through Your Son. Your Name is glorious. Your works are glorious. You are glorious in holiness. The Gospel of Your Son is glorious. Your Church is glorious. All glory belongs to You!

Almighty God, we confess our failure in hallowing Your glorious Name. In whatever we do, we seek our good and pleasure instead of Your glory and praise. We project ourselves instead of exalting Your Name. We gloat over our tiny accomplishments instead of Your marvellous works. Give us a glimpse of Your glory. Even while worshipping You, we are more conscious of our musical talents and singing skills than Your awesomeness. We think too much of ourselves instead of realising how great You are. We thank You for Jesus who glorified You perfectly on earth. Though He was equal to You, He emptied Himself of all glory and gave You all the glory. Help us follow Him.

Dear Lord, we thank You for the Bible characters who hid themselves in order to glorify You. Help us never to touch Your glory. You are a jealous God. You would not share Your glory with anyone. Your Son glorified You. Your Spirit glorifies You. Let us, as the Church and as individuals, have the glorification of Your Name as our chief aim. Let our light so shine before the outsiders that they might see our good works and glorify You.

Father God, we thank You for the privilege You have granted us to glorify You through our sufferings. Thank You for the persecution we face when we speak for You. We thank You, dear Lord, for the assurance that if we suffer with Your Son, we shall also reign with Him. Grant us the joy the apostles had in being counted worthy to suffer for His sake. Yes, Lord, You are worthy of our suffering. Let it ascend as a sweet-smelling aroma before You. Let every cross in our life remind us of the crown that awaits us.

Almighty God, we pray for the Church under severe persecution in anti-Christian nations. Strengthen them to bear the pain and the losses. We pray for the bereaved families of the martyrs. Be everything to them, dear Lord. Let no intimidation stop us, but stir us up to go on witnessing for Jesus with renewed vigour. In His Name, we pray! Amen!

*(Eph 1:17; 1 Tim 6:16; Psa 29:3; Hab 3:3; Mt 5:16; 6:13; 19:28; 1 Cor 10:31; Jn 17:4; Phil 2:5-8; Isa 42:8; 1 Pet 4:14-16; 2 Tim 2:12; Acts 5:41; Heb 13:12,13)*