

## ***Inscape March 2016***

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**Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:**

**May you always be consciously aware of the grace and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the love and mercy of God the Father, and the communion of the Life-Giving Holy Spirit dwelling within your heart!**

### **WHY MUST I SUFFER?**

Immediately following Forgiveness Sunday (Cheesefare), the Great Fast begins on Monday March 14<sup>th</sup>. The first week of Great Lent is ushered in with The Great Canon of Saint Andrew of Crete and the initial celebrations of the Presanctified Liturgy on Wednesdays and Fridays. The Orthodox Church holds out to us, in our sorrow for our sins and transgressions and our struggles to accept in love the sufferings that come to us, the victory of Jesus Risen. We mediate these days of March as we stretch forward toward Pascha, the words of Saint Peter: "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time. Casting all your cares upon God, for he cares for you. Be vigilant and be cautious, because your adversary, the devil, like a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour. Rise up, therefore, against him, as you are steadfast in the faith, knowing that your brethren who are in the world also suffered these same afflictions" (1 Peter 5: 6-9).

The question of why God allows you to suffer by permitting physical and moral evils to attack you has been the universal lament of all created human beings. If we of so little faith "Jesus said to them, Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?..." (Matthew 8:26), had our way and if God really would come through as Jesus promised He would, we would never suffer, never die, never have any enemies or foes or adversaries attack us. But then, we would only wallow in our own self-centeredness and never truly fulfill the two great commandments our Lord and Master and God gave us: "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deuteronomy 6:5); and "...you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I AM the Lord" (Leviticus 19:18).

Therefore this month's important topic centers on the problem of suffering and evil, since it touches the essence of our response to God's revelation that He is always loving toward us. How often you must find yourself asking the question: "Why must human beings, especially the young and the innocent, suffer so unjustly before great evils in our world if God is supposed to be Love and All-Knowing?" There can never be given an adequate, rational answer to this question. Jesus, through His example and the infusion of His Spirit of faith, hope and love, points to a knowledge that leads us beyond intellection into the world of mystery.

### **WHY MUST I SUFFER?**

From all times and unto the ages of ages in the history of the human race, people have asked the same question and will continue to do so, even more so in our modern times: "If God is a Good and All-Powerful God and really loves us, why does He cause or permit evil and its concomitant suffering to happen, especially to the innocent?" You and I in the throes of our personal sufferings, have, no doubt, posed this exact same question to God many times!

The German poet, Rainer Marie Rilke (+1927; poems about the search for God and the nature of prayer), in his poem, "To Live Everything," gives us a deep insight for Christians who seek a rational answer to so perplexing a problem: "Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart...Try to love the questions themselves...Do not seek the answers, which cannot be given because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the

question now. Perhaps you will then, gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answers.”

The Christian is not to seek answers from Jesus, for He came not to give answers, but to become the question about suffering. When the Word of God (Logos) leapt out of the Triune Community of Love and in peaceful silence came into a world of sin and death, evil and sufferings, He did not come to take away all evil and sufferings. He came to take upon Himself all our sins and sufferings. He suffered as you and I do, not to be an answer to our problems about evil and sufferings, but to become The Way whereby we could rise in a transformation from sufferings with Christ to a sharing, even now, with Him in glory (Romans 8:28). “O Lord our God, Your love for us is beyond expression, for it pleased You to make Your Only-Begotten Son a man of a pure woman, like us in every way except sin. As man He was baptized for our sakes by John the Forerunner, though He had no need of purification, that He might make the nature of water holy and favor us with rebirth from water and from the Spirit. Eternal Father, He was baptized, that we might recognize You, that we might adore and praise Your beloved Son from heaven, and that we might glorify Your Holy Spirit, Who descended upon Him, and showed Him to the Baptist. In Him You sealed and anointed us through baptism, You made us sharers of Your Christ. Through Him do not fail us sinners but strengthen us against all evil powers...” (Amvon Prayer of the Holy Theophany of Our Lord God and Saviour Jesus Christ).

## **OLD TESTAMENT VIEWS OF SUFFERING**

The Jews, in the Old Testament, held two predominant attitudes toward sufferings. We find the typical, popular attitude given by the three friends of Job. Sufferings befell an individual because of personal sins committed against the laws of God. Job insists that he has not sinned and brings a turning point to Jewish thinking as Job moves to a humble surrendering to God’s love and wisdom.

The World of Mystery presents through faith in a loving God, not a rational answer for the presence of sufferings in all human lives, but a world of faith and trust in God’s goodness and power to draw out of such darkness new creative manifestations of His glory. The Book of Job shows us that there can be no logical answer since divine wisdom and power are beyond any human power to understand. Faith must carry on, even when understanding fails. “I know that Thou canst do all these things, and that no purpose can be hid from Thee. Who am I to think that I can give counsel without knowledge? Therefore Thou hast declared to me that I have uttered that which I did not understand, things too wonderful for me which I did not know. Hear me, I pray Thee, and I will speak; I will ask Thee, and declare Thou to me; I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees Thee. Therefore, I will keep silent, and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42: 2-6).

Beyond all questions, there is only the answer from God: “Trust in Me and My love for you. What is impossible for you to understand now, is possible for Me to draw forth much good, since all things, even sufferings, work unto good to those who love and trust in Me.”

## **JESUS AND SUFFERING**

What was Jesus’ attitude toward suffering and evil? Like His ancestors, He “wrestled,” not so much with an intellectual struggle about the why of evil and suffering, but with the forces of evil that permeated far beyond any individual human being. Saint Paul called this “the principalities and the powers.” Realistically, Jesus encountered evil as a cancerous circumstance pervading all of human society, its institutions and the structures of the world.

Jesus encounters evil wherever He finds it and His strategy is to invite His listeners to accept, not the mere hope of some eternal happiness in the life to come, but Himself as the Way to greater, unending life. He insisted with those who gave Him a hearing that the only answer to the problem of suffering stemming from evils, seen and unseen, is to follow Him into life and live the way He lived His life unto greater glory of the Father.

Like a warrior leaping into the battle, so Jesus approached the problem of evil and the concomitant sufferings as a warfare against inimical, hostile and harmful powers. Sin is more for Jesus than what individual persons freely and deliberately commit against God's commands. The mystery of evil invaded deeply within the human unconscious, but also throughout the cosmic strata. Sin is truly the condition where a person is not becoming what her or she is created to be.

He became the Suffering Servant of Yahweh, foretold by Deutero-Isaiah, who was a man, similar to us and "familiar with sufferings" (Isaiah 53:3). Understanding this, we can now accept that our souls are made or unmade by the quality of our response to suffering. Who we "are" and who we will "become" centers on the body, soul and spirit relationships that must be developed within the harmony and peace of the whole person made in the image and likeness of God. The Spiritual Peace of the Soul (Petition during Divine Liturgy) must be made manifest in one's; intellect, reason, imagination, memory, will, understanding, perceptions, desires, motives, emotions, choices, and ultimately by Trust and True Faith in the Providence of God. May we all be blessed with "Peace of Heart."

We can see how Jesus, in the personal encounter of Himself with evil and the sufferings that came to Him from various sources, became, gradually, in a process of struggling in faith, hope and love with such evil and sufferings, transformed by the very darkness into the eternal, glorious light that He was from all eternity (John 1:5).

He encountered our doubts and weaknesses. He daily encounters us in our Emmaus journey to chide us: "O dull-minded and heavy-hearted, slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken; Did not Christ have to suffer all these things in order to enter into his glory?" (Luke 24: 25-26).

## **SUFFERING TO DO GOD'S WILL**

Whatever Jesus would ask of His disciples, He Himself did in His earthly life. When He washed the feet of His disciples, He summarized who He was. He was Ebed Yahweh, God's servant, suffering for His people. Although evil forces heaped upon Him much suffering, also, He sought to bear sufferings of those who came to Him for help. "Help us, save us, have mercy on us, and protect us O God, by Thy grace!" (Divine Liturgy Petition)

And the reason He could move to a higher dimension of viewing evil and sufferings was that He was vitally conscious that everything He did came from His Father. He lived only to please Him and bring Him glory. Over and over, He confessed that He was nothing, while His Father was all (John 5:19; John 5:30).

Jesus reveals an inner consciousness of His ultimate worth and meaning as a human being who derives all meaningfulness from His complete dependence upon the Father. There is no vanity or self-seeking in His words or actions. His primary motivation is to serve the wishes of His Heavenly Father. He lives in His loving presence, as He becomes more and more surrendering in each moment to the working of His Father in His life. "My Father goes on working, and so do I" (John 5:17). As the Father loves Him and serves Him in all things, so Jesus loves and serves us (John 15:9). "He who sees Me, sees the Father!"

Jesus progressively became conscious that His service to the Father was to be a service on behalf of all God's people. He lived in human form the truth that life is always active, self-

emptying, and always ready to bear all sufferings, even death itself, to show that love for others. Love never fails! Love never ends!

That service, in God's eternal plan of salvation, was to be pushed to such self-forgetting that Jesus would be brought to become a free gift of Himself on behalf of the human race. He would literally and freely give Himself to die for each of us. His attitude toward evil and suffering can never be separated from His consciousness that He was to become the perfect image in human form of how much the Heavenly Father loves His children, even unto death.

## **LOVE IS SUFFERING UNTO SELF-EMPTYING**

Saint Paul presents to us a hymn, well known to the early Christian communities of the first century, as the way and the reason why Jesus emptied Himself on our behalf by His death on the cross. He introduces this hymn of divine love with these words to his readers (be the same mind of Christ Jesus): "Reason this within you, which Jesus Christ also reasoned...who, though he is by nature God, did not consider his equality with God a condition to be clung to, but emptied himself by taking the nature of a servant, fashioned as he was to the likeness of men, and recognized by outward appearance as man. He humbled himself and became obedient to death; yes, to death on a cross. This is why God has exulted him and gave him the name above every other name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, of those on earth, and those under the earth. And every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is the **Lord** (Kyrios), to the glory of God his Father" (Philippians 2:5-11).

Jesus' attitude before sufferings and even death itself is seen as an act of faith, hope and love, as He is turned in complete submission and obedience to do His Father's will. He disregarded the shamefulness of the cross (Hebrews 12:2), enduring it for love of us.

The extreme sufferings of Jesus, physical, psychical and spiritual, can never be understood logically. Just as our human love knows various degrees of acting out in generosity the love we have for another, depending on how much love we have experienced from God and other human beings. So Jesus, in intimate union with the Father, must have received progressively deeper and deeper assurances of the Father's self-emptying love for Him.

As Jesus experienced in prayerful communion (and union) His Father's infinite, constant and perfect love for Him, He grew in His sensitivity to what love was asking by way of a self-oblation. He wished to go beyond the boundaries imposed by justice or even by the delicate whisperings of what the Father wished of Him in any given moment. (Fr. George called this; "creative suffering." It is what keeps love alive. It is fire touching dry wood and making it turn into fire also.

## **SUFFERING ALL THINGS CREATIVELY**

We can, perhaps, now begin to see a shadowy outline, not of an answer to why we need to suffer in our lives, but of the way that Jesus chose on our behalf. And He invites us to come to Him to learn how He suffered, so that in His Spirit of love, we, too, might learn by His example to suffer all things "creatively." In Christ Jesus, we learn to suffer and die with Him, but also to rise and ascend with Him.

Jesus gave us human beings, who have been born into sin of our ancestors, the "sin of the world," the capability of living now in the grace of regenerated children of God. Through His suffering and death on the cross, Jesus laid His hands on the roots of evil in human history and completely uprooted them. He does this because, by becoming human as we are, He also assumed the sins of us all.

He does not give us an answer in order to understand the logical reasons for our own sufferings and those of all other human beings the world over. Nor does He promise to put to

an end all evils and sufferings in this temporal world of ours. The Gospel of Jesus (Most truly the Good News) is an invitation to us to believe as He did in a God of Unconditional Love, even amid our most extreme sufferings and evils in and around us.

We Christians believe and trust in Jesus Christ as our sole Redeemer and Liberator from sin and death of God's life within us. All human beings on the face of the earth have to bear many sufferings during their earthly sojourn. Yet, Christians are graced to live in the Mystery of Faith in Jesus Christ that transforms our very sufferings into a more intense sharing in the Trinity's eternal life. By the Holy Spirit's gifts of faith, trust and love, we can rise from what seems to be a disastrous, meaningless, even irrational suffering to embrace a new oneness with the risen Lord Jesus.

### **INTERIORIZING OUR FAITH**

Faith is the midwife that assists us to emerge out of a dark cocoon of fear, doubt and ignorance (spiritual darkness) as a newborn butterfly. Rather, boring, monotonous events, even those of little or great sufferings, can be consecrated by faith, hope and love into a happy fault, leading from death to new levels of oneness with God and neighbor (and Who is my neighbor?—all human beings) in love.

Such trying moments can become true participations in the resurrected life of Jesus Christ. In the very moment of consecrating our sufferings to God with Jesus out of love of God and fellow-human beings, we already enter into a new sharing in His glory (Romans 8:17). As we abandon ourselves in loving surrender, we experience a new insertion into the life of Christ.

The first stage of increasing our faith and making it more "interiorized" by greater union with the risen Lord is, in the words of the early Fathers of the desert, "...to push the mind down into the heart, and remain there." It is to enter into the "inner closet" that Jesus spoke about when He instructed His disciples how to pray in His Spirit (Matthew 6:6). This is a call to move away from our "carnal-mindedness" in order to enter into a transcendental presence to the Indwelling Trinity. It is the "placeless place" of the heart wherein we are to meet the risen Jesus, who reveals through His Spirit's faith that these sufferings at hand can truly work unto good to those who love the Lord (Romans 8:28).

The second stage for interiorizing our faith is to seek to know who we are in the very throes of sufferings. Sufferings force us to ask with urgency: "Who am I?" In asking this question, we are forced in our brokenness and sinfulness, our "zero-ness" of any power to bear with meaningfulness such seemingly illogical things as sufferings and evils, including our own sinfulness, to confront who Jesus Christ really is for ourselves. Every human being must eventually answer the question Our Lord and God and Saviour presents: "But you, who do You say I am?" (Mark 8:29).

### **PRAISE AND GLORY TO THE LORD**

The sign of our emerging into a new level in Jesus before our loving Father through their mutual Holy Spirit, is our readiness to praise God in all circumstances. We readily praise and thank God in prosperity when we happily receive from God health, riches or, at least, all the temporal things we are in need of: honors, friends, successes in our undertakings. God the Father knows what we need "even before we ask or are aware of it." All of God's actions toward us are of loving kindness, righteous judgment, mercy and forgiveness.

But the true follower of Jesus learns through the Holy Spirit's infusion of faith, hope and love how to praise God in all seasons, under all circumstances. Praise is what flows from the depths of our being as we surrender lovingly to God who is in all things loving us and

showering upon us the gift of Himself in whatever happens to us. "O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall declare your praise!"

The Old and New Testaments teach us that our loving God not only permits evils and our own sins to happen, but He also actively causes certain pains and sufferings to happen to us. We must believe by His revelation that He is Love by nature. He always acts only out of love for us and never, ever, out of retribution. Many of the evils and sufferings that we encounter come about, either by God's providential and permissive will in matters of moral evil, or by God's active working, but always to draw us closer to Him, the ultimate Source of all our happiness. "I am the one who reproveth and disciplines all those he loves" (Revelation 3:19; Proverbs 3:12; John 15:1-2; Hebrews 12:7-11).

"Thou didst (suffer) lay down Thy body and blood for all, O crucified Word: Thy body in order to renew me, Thy blood in order to wash me, and Thou didst surrender Thy Spirit, O Christ, in order to bring me to the Father...Where God wills, the order of nature is overruled; for He does whatever He wishes" (The Great Canon, The Work of Saint Andrew of Crete).

"For physical training profits only for a little while; but righteousness is profitable in all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come. This is a true saying and worthy to be accepted. Because of this, we both toil and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men..." (1 Timothy 4:8-10).

"...since I have no righteousness of my own gained from the law, but the righteousness which comes through the faith of Christ; that is, the righteousness which comes from God. So that through this righteousness I may know Jesus and the power of his resurrection, and be a partaker of his sufferings, even to a death like his" (Philippians 3: 9-10).

### **FILLING UP THE SUFFERINGS IN THE BODY OF CHRIST**

As we lovingly and joyfully accept such adversities from others acting upon us, we begin to see them, no longer as mere crosses, but as steps to a new transformation into Christ. Saint Paul teaches us this mystery: "I rejoice now in the sufferings I bear for your sake, and what is lacking to the sufferings of Christ, I supply in my flesh for the benefit of his Body, which is the Church" (Colossians 1:24). As we share in union with Christ our sufferings out of love for God and others, we truly can bring Christ's victory (over sin and death), through His death unto the building of His Body, the Church.

Having beheld the Resurrection of Christ, let us worship the Holy Lord Jesus, the only Sinless One. We venerate Your Cross, O Christ, and we praise and glorify Your Holy Resurrection. You are our God. We are Your people. We are all the work of Your hands. We know no other than You, and we call upon Your Name. Come, all faithful, let us venerate the holy Resurrection of Christ.

For behold, through the Cross, joy has come to all the world. Blessing the Lord always, let us praise His Resurrection. For enduring the Cross for us, He has destroyed death by death. (Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom)

### **Prayers of St. Ephraim the Syrian and the Optina Elders**

O Lord, heavenly King, Comforter, Spirit of Truth, have compassion and mercy on Your sinful servant, and pardon my unworthiness, and forgive me all the sins that I committed today, known and unknown, from my youth and from evil suggestions, and from brazenness, and from boredom.

If I have sworn by Your name, or blasphemed it in thought, blamed or reproached anyone, or in my anger have detracted or slandered anyone, or grieved anyone, or if I have become angry about anything, or have told a lie, if I have slept unnecessarily, or if a beggar

has come to me and I despised or neglected him, or if I have troubled those around me or quarreled with them, or if I have condemned anyone, or have boasted, or have been proud, or lost my temper with anyone.

Or if standing in prayer, my mind has been distracted by the glamour of this world, or if I have had impure thoughts or have overeaten, or have drunk excessively, or laughed frivolously, or have thought evil, or have seen the attraction of someone and been wounded by it in my heart, or said indecent things, or made fun of the sins of others when my own faults are countless, or been neglectful of prayer, or have done some other wrong that I cannot remember.

Have mercy, My Lord and Creator, on me Your weak servant, and absolve and forgive me all my sins, and deliver me in Your Goodness and Love for mankind.

Grant to me my Lord, that with peace of mind, I may face **all** that this new day is to bring. Grant me grace to surrender myself completely to Your holy will. For every hour of this day, instruct and prepare me in all things.

Whatever tidings I may receive during the day, do You teach me to accept tranquilly, in the firm conviction that all eventualities fulfill Your Holy Will. Govern my thoughts and feelings in all I do and say. When things unforeseen occur, let me not forget that all comes down from You.

Teach me to behave sincerely and reasonably toward every member of my family, that I may bring confusion and sorrow to none. Teach me to be thankful at all times and for everything. Bestow on me my Lord, strength to endure the fatigue of the day, and to bear my part in all its passing events.

May Your blessings, guide my heart and my soul. **Teach me to pray, to believe, to hope, to suffer, to forgive, and to love.** Amen.

“The dark storm clouds of life bring no terror to those in whose hearts Thy fire is burning brightly. Outside is the darkness of the whirlwind, the terror and howling of the storm, but in the heart, in the presence of Christ, there is light and peace, silence: Alleluia!” (**Kontakion 5**)

(The Akathist Hymn: “Glory to God for All Things” also called the Akathist of Thanksgiving; composed by Protopresbyter Gregory Petrov before his death in a prison camp in 1940. It is a song of praise from amidst the most terrible sufferings).

When you make progress in the spiritual life by lovingly accepting sufferings, the attack by the enemy, the adversary, becomes more intense. You will be despised by many in the world who possess and live by an earthly spirit.

Saint Paul wrote to Timothy (and to us) a fitting summary to this month's *Inscape*: all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecutions; do not be discouraged; persevere in love and patience; for trials and afflictions (pain, suffering, distress, misery) will not be lacking (2 Timothy 3:10-15).

“My beloved, do not think it strange at the trials that come upon you, as though some strange thing happened to you, because these things are to prove you. But rejoice, for you are partakers of Christ's sufferings; and when his glory shall be revealed you may be glad also with exceeding joy” (1 Peter 4:12-13).

## The Nicene-Constantinople Creed (325 and 381 A.D.)

I believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty,  
Creator of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.  
And in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God,  
begotten of the Father before all ages.

Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten, not created,  
of one essence with the Father, through whom all things were made.  
For us and for our salvation, He came down from heaven,  
and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary,  
and became man.

He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate,  
and He **suffered** and was **buried**.

On the third day He rose according to the Scriptures...

We are to blame for the calamities in the world, for the sufferings of dumb creatures and for the diseases and torments of blameless children, for through the fall of man the beatitude and beauty of all creation have been marred. O Lord, Healer of Mankind, remember and save all aborted fetuses, miscarriages, stillborn babies, infants who died prematurely, children with mental retardation, and those billions of people who died without a living faith; or died before reaching sufficient development to know You in faith, hope and love, as the Saviour of the world. O Christ our God, greatest of innocent sufferers, You alone have power to forgive all. Forgive, then, all and everything, return to the world its former prosperity, that both the living and the dead may find peace, crying: Alleluia! (Akathist for the Repose of the Departed; Kontakion 3)

April's *Inscape* will continue with the teaching on suffering; Jesus—"The Way"—Trust in Time of Suffering.

In Christ's love and blessings for all mankind,  
*Father John Michael Zboyovski*