

In the Name of the Father, and of the ☩ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Do not be ashamed, for the Apostle is not ashamed. He is not ashamed of the testimony of our Lord. He bids you not be ashamed of the slander he suffers, but rather to share in his suffering. That is not the kind of invitation one seeks – to share in suffering.

And yet the Apostle's suffering is for the Gospel, according to the power of God. God's power is demonstrated in the Apostle's suffering. And it is demonstrated in yours, inasmuch as you suffer for the Gospel.

The theology of glory teaches that if your faith is sufficient, you will endure no suffering. Smiling televangelists pace the stage and admonish you to be all that you can be, that if you visualize success God will grant it according to your faithfulness.

But the Apostle teaches something very different. His faithfulness was great, and yet he suffered to the extent that he feared the nascent Church would be ashamed of him, and so the Gospel he preached and taught.

The Apostle prayed that his affliction would be taken away. He prayed not once, not twice, but three times. He prayed fervently, believing, and yet praying that God's will be done. And God answered him: "'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.'

God's power, God's strength, God's love, are not demonstrated in earthly success. Christians suffer in this world, because we are not of this world.

So the Apostle writes "Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." He understood the Words of Christ, when the Lord Himself taught "... they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another."

Already in the time of Jesus' Disciples this was true. Most were martyred, all suffered persecution and imprisonment, and the shame of the world. So as the secular media berates Christians, as the godless society in which we live holds us to be delusional, a little slow mentally, outdated in our beliefs, bigoted, and even hateful, do not be surprised. We live in a country that persecutes Christians, and in a world where Christians are regularly put to death.

But do not be ashamed. Do not be ashamed of the suffering. Do not be ashamed that your brothers and sisters suffer. For you the Apostle writes "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

Almighty God demonstrated His inestimable power by taking on Flesh. His power, His love, was shown to the world in what appeared to be weakness. He allowed Himself to be arrested, falsely accused, and put to death.

In that death, contrary to the wisdom of the world, is the greatest of victories. In that death is a strength that surpasses worldly strength. For in that death are your sins removed. In that death are the sins of the world removed. In that death, in

Christ's suffering and death, in His shame and tribulation, by His suffering, you are reconciled to God. As the Apostle writes, Christ abolished death by His glorious resurrection, and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel.

Now, in this time, the Lord's Words are fulfilled "...because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved." These are words for you, dear Christian. Tribulations come. Suffering is here. Persecution grows. But you have hope. As the Apostle writes, "Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus."

The Christian lives with his eyes pointed towards heaven. The Christian fixes his eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith. Baptized into Christ, forgiven, redeemed, restored, healed of soul, the world cannot harm you.

You have God's Word. You have the Holy Sacraments. You have the Divine Service. You have the Holy Liturgy. You have the Gospel Promise. You have Christ, you have His life, you have His Victory. And soon, at His coming, you will be delivered.

So you, in saving faith, confess with St. Paul "Nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day."

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