

Peace and Hope

This weekly bulletin insert complements the curriculum published by the Department of Christian Education of the Orthodox Church in America. This and many other Christian Education resources are available at <http://dce.oca.org>.



On June 13 we read Romans 5: 1-10. Here, St. Paul gives us a sort of spiritual progression in which suffering leads to real hope.

He begins by saying that we have peace with God through Jesus Christ. The peace that comes from Christ is a special kind, as Our Lord Himself made clear in speaking with His apostles: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you" (John 14:27).

It is certainly possible to be "at peace" in ways that don't involve Jesus Christ. Many people fortunate enough to have loyal friends, enough money to pay the bills, and reasonably good health might well say they are at peace with life.

But Paul means something more, and in the next verses he goes on to describe what he means. He makes the startling statement that as Christians we "rejoice in our sufferings." The worldly kind of peace usually excludes deep suffering; it is characterized more by comfort and contentment. So it is clear that Paul is talking about that "special kind" of peace.

Paul can rejoice in sufferings because he sees every experience as having meaning. Each thing that happens can bring us closer to God, because He is our Creator, and nothing that takes place is due to good or bad "luck" or happenstance. So those who love Him rejoice in whatever comes, even things that would seem terrible in a world of chaos, one that didn't belong to a loving Maker.

Because the world does belong to Him, and is ordered by Him, Paul can go on to say that "suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope." If we can endure suffering that we believe is meaningful, we will develop a strong character. Then, having been tested and having passed the test, or endured, we will have grounds for a firm hope. A person who lives in hope is at peace—the real peace, based on real hope.

Despite all the worry, exhaustion, disappointment and danger of his life, Paul had this peace. He is perfectly capable of leaving everything in God's hands. So when he writes with grateful amazement that Christ "died for the ungodly," he adds something else. He says that Christ died "at the right time." Paul's confidence in God's plan is absolute, and he accepts it completely. This is the source of his peace.

Troparion - Tone 4

Your lamb Aquilina, calls out to You, O Jesus, in a loud voice:
"I love You, my Bridegroom, and in seeking You I endure suffering.
In baptism I was crucified so that I might reign in You,
and I died so that I might live with You.
Accept me as a pure sacrifice,
for I have offered myself in love."
Through her prayers save our souls, since You are merciful.

On this day we remember someone else who has something to show us about peace and hope. She is St. Aquilina, who underwent terrible tortures and endured them all. She begged God to let her die a martyr's death, having a sure hope of the Kingdom and peace in her heart. The story is similar to those of other saints, but there is one feature that makes it a little different from others: when Aquilina gave her life for Christ with such confidence, she was all of twelve years old.