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SUFFERING ORTHODOXY

Fr. Seraphim Rose

... and so it has been from the beginning, throughout the whole history of the Church. The followers of the crucified God have suffered persecutions and tortures. Almost all the Apostles died as martyrs, Peter being crucified upside-down, and Andrew being crucified on an x-shaped cross (Note: also remember the martyrdoms of St. Stephen and St. James the Just, Head and First Bishop of the Christian Church in Jerusalem.) During the first three centuries of Christianity, believers fled to the catacombs and endured tremendous sufferings. It was in the catacombs that the Church's Divine Services - which we celebrate today in a form little changed since that time - were worked out in an atmosphere of constant expectation of death. After the age of the catacombs there was a struggle to retain the purity of the Faith, when many teachers tried to substitute personal opinions for the divinely revealed teachings given by our Lord Jesus Christ. In later centuries, there were the invasions of Orthodox countries by Arabs, Turks, other non-Christian peoples, and finally - in our own days - by communists. Communism, which has persecuted religion as it has never been persecuted before, has attacked first of all precisely the Orthodox lands of Eastern Europe. As can be seen, therefore, our Faith is a *suffering* Faith, and in this suffering, something goes on which helps the heart receive God's revelation.

OUR GREATEST DUTY IS TO SUFFER

St. Ignatius (Brianchaninov)

Since you follow the Saviour Jesus Christ through your devotion to the angelic way of life, your greatest duty is to bear all suffering, whether it comes from nature, indolence, sins or people.

DO NOT BE ASHAMED TO SUFFER AS A CHRISTIAN

St. Peter

Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him cease being ashamed, but keep on glorifying God in respect to this. For it is the time for the judgment to begin from the house of God; but if first from us, what shall be the end of those who disobey the Gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and sinner appear? Wherefore, let them that suffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator (I Peter 4:16-19).

THE CONSEQUENCES OF FLEEING FROM CHRIST

St. Irenaeus

For where the Church is, there is the Spirit of God; and where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church, and every kind of grace; but the Spirit is truth. Those, therefore, who do not partake of Him, are neither nourished into life from the mother's breasts, nor do they enjoy that most limpid fountain which issues from the body of Christ; but they dig for themselves broken cisterns (Jer. 2:13) out of earthly trenches, and drink putrid water out of the mire, fleeing from the faith of the Church lest they be convicted; and rejecting the Spirit, that they may not be instructed.

TWO WAYS

The Twelve Apostles as in The Didache

(1) There are two ways, one of life and one of death, and there is a great difference between these two ways.

(2) Now this is the way of life: first, 'you shall love God, who made you'; second, 'your neighbour as yourself;' and 'whatever you do not wish to happen to you, do not do to another.'

FOLLOW RIGHTEOUS TEACHING ONLY

The Twelve Apostles, The Didache

But if the teacher himself goes astray and teaches a different teaching that undermines all this, do not listen to him. However, if his teaching contributes to righteousness and knowledge of the Lord, welcome him as you would the Lord.

THE LAST DAYS

The Twelve Apostles, The Didache

For in the last days the false prophets and corrupters will abound, and the sheep will be turned into wolves, and love will be turned into hate.

PRAY AS THE LORD COMMANDED

The Twelve Apostles, The Didache

Nor should you pray like the hypocrites. Instead, 'pray like this,' just as the Lord commanded in His Gospel:

Our Father in Heaven, hallowed by Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us today our daily bread, and forgive us our debt, as we also forgive our debtors; and do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one; for Thine is the power and the glory forever. (Matt. 6:9-13)