

Pain and Sorrow in our Lives (1) (Elder Ephraim of Arizona)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



The path of life is all pain and tears; all thorns and nails; crosses everywhere; anxiety and sorrow. Every step is a Gethsemane. Every slope's a Golgotha. Every second's a spear-thrust. 'If we could squeeze the earth like a sponge, it would drip blood and tears'.

'The days of man are but as grass, as the flower of the field he shall wither', says the psalmist.

The rose produces thorns and thorns the rose. What is beautiful is linked to pain, but pain produces joy. It's normal for a rainbow to appear after a storm. Unless there's a storm, the stars don't all come out.

Discernment- illumined by Christian faith and philosophy- sees. It has the ability, through sight, to see far beyond the way things seem. Through the pain, it sees the

joy and the hope, just as the triumph of Christ came through the pain of the Passion and the Cross.



The most beautiful statues have suffered the most damage. Great souls owe their greatness to the blows of pain. Gold and precious jewellery first pass through the fire.

Pain is a shock to our existence. It's fire, a furnace that burns and sears. It's a storm and a tempest. Solomos [the Greek poet] says: 'My viscera and the sea are never still'. There are times when trials come in quick succession, one after another, or all together. Then the cross is very heavy. Anxiety peaks. The soul is so burdened it's in danger of being overwhelmed. Everything seems black, everything's dark. There's no way out. Saint Gregory the Theologian says: 'The good things have gone, galling trials loom, the journey takes place at night, there's no lighthouse and it seems Christ is sleeping'.

The sorrows of life are stab-wounds. Stab-wounds that slice into and pierce our hearts without mercy. They inflame them and paralyze them to exhaustion.

All that remains in such moments is the cry we raise to God in pained supplication: 'Have mercy on me, Lord... My soul is sorely troubled... I have laboured in my

sighing... my heart has become like melted wax... Have mercy on me, Lord, for I mourn...my life has passed in pain and my years in sighing... I am forgotten as those who are dead... My tears are my bread day and night... why should my soul be sad, why do you bring me into turmoil?’

We are the rulers of creation, but the crown is made of thorns. Sometimes our path is a song and a symphony of joy, but most often it’s a sad, unending funeral march.

The problem of pain is great and eternal. Philosophers, sociologists, psychologists and many others have all studied it. But the most authentic answer is provided by Christianity, faith and the law of God. And the answer is twofold. Theologically, it’s the result of the fall, as are all evils. It’s the result of the misuse of our freedom. It’s the fruit of disobedience. Morally, it’s the opportunity and means for gaining virtue and perfection.

Saint Gregory the Theologian says that he will always respect God, whatever impediments He allows to confront him. He says that, for him, pain is the medication of salvation. Basil the Great, also, says: ‘Given that God has prepared a crown for us in His Kingdom, may sickness be an opportunity to acquire virtue’. Saint John Chrysostom also says that sorrows bring us closer to God: ‘And when we consider the eternal benefits of sorrows, we won’t be concerned’.

Holy Saint Paul, who was so persecuted and wounded and pierced through with the ‘wounds of the Lord’, teaches that God allows us to suffer sorrows for our own good, so that we may partake of His holiness.

God has thousands of ways of making you see His love. Christ can transform unhappiness into a melodic song of praise. The Lord says: ‘Your sorrow will become joy’.

Such a battle, such a victory. ‘In the market in heaven, there aren’t any cheap goods’. Moments of pain and sacrifice are moments of blessing. With every cross, there’s a resurrection. So what if now we’re in pain and weep continuously? Saint Paul tells the Corinthians: ‘For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure’.

People who see and face pain through the prism of eternity are already, from this moment, victors. They’re exceptional, in that they’ve arrived at joy through their indomitable faith in God. They’ve tasted the goodness of the Lord and are potentially crown-bearers. With Saint Paul, they can repeat the victory cry: ‘I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on

there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day'.

With these metaphysical dimensions, the transcendence of pain and its transformation into redemptive joy becomes a reality. It's an alteration which is due to the power of God. It's a renewal- absurd to those who depend on reason- a natural consequence of Christian faith. For people of faith, it's the great miracle of the transformation of God. Experiencing pain metaphysically brings the solution to life's great problem. It leads from darkness into light.

So we should accept any pain which visits us as a blessing from God. Wheat is crushed and dissolves in the earth but then brings forth life. The harvest of pain is rich and blessed. God's blessing is great in the field of tears. It's a blessing which is experienced by all those who truly believe, with the gift of discernment.

(to be continued)