

### Trinity III (28-06-09)

*“the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world”*

(Epistle)

This is a difficult time for Christians. We are persecuted by secularism, by militant atheism, by Islam, by false brethren, and if it is bad here, it is worse elsewhere. And each of us has private griefs. Yet we must have faith. And be aware of the underlying threat. When ACNA launched, in the face of errors in North America, they studied today's Epistle, because they were well aware of the risk of the devil working amongst them. We might think that John Keble had an easier Christian life in his Victorian village, but no. Here is part of his sermon on the text. CITATION begins.

As if S. Peter had said, "I am not ignorant how you feel, when temptations and trials come upon you. I know it comes over your mind continually, Surely no one ever was tempted exactly as I am; surely my trials, and burthens are more intolerable than men commonly endure." When the persecution of the heathen comes on, then, S. Peter seems to say, then each one of you will be inclined to think his own share in it worse than that of all others. With that imagination, the devil would slacken your resistance, would make you less hearty and earnest in standing firm against all that he can do. He goeth about the fold, like a roaring lion prowling about, seeking whom he may devour, which of the lambs he may find straying. But be not you moved by him; set your faces steadily against him, knowing that the same trouble, or quite as bad, has to be endured by your brethren, scattered, as you are, among the heathen.

Other Christians in other places will be persecuted as well as you. They will be comforted in thinking of you, as you may be in thinking of them. You are not alone in the world. Christ's Body every where, in its distressed members, feels for you and with you. They all fear and grieve in your fear and grief: all rejoice with you when the Almighty grants you relief. Therefore be of good courage: that which is the portion of all God's saints and servants ought not to seem hard to you. It is what He gives to those whom He loves best: you should account it a token of His love, and so make it welcome, hard as it may be for flesh and blood to bear. Thus S. Peter encourages his suffering brethren, when a time of trouble was coming on; much as S. Paul had before encouraged the Corinthians. *"There hath no temptation taken you, but such as is common to man:"* nothing that is beyond human strength, assisted by the grace of the Holy Ghost, to bear. *"For God is faithful, Who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will, with the temptation, make also a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."* God, as the saying is, suits the shoulder to the burden. If He lays any part of His Son's Cross upon you, you know that He has united you to that Son, has made you a member of Him, that by His strength you might endure what you never could endure by yourself.

And to encourage us still more, He shews us, as here in the text, the example of our brethren that are in the world. He seems to say, "Look at My promise: look at the plain words of the Bible, 'Your Father which is in heaven, will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him.' And if that be not enough, look at the lives of My saints: look and see how good and penitent persons, from time to time, have really been helped to keep these commands, which you think too hard, and to resist these temptations, which you think too strong. Think of your brethren that are in the world, how they have the same afflictions to endure, and are not overcome. The same helps which are offered to them, are offered to you. The same hand which upholds them, is stretched out to you. 'Only do you lay hold of it, and keep your hold.' " CITATION ends.

We were never promised an easy life as Christians, and God does not privilege traditionalists! Almost the only possible saying of our Lord outside those recorded in the New Testament runs "He that is near me is near the fire". The privileges of discipleship come "with persecutions" (see Mark 10.30). No easy life, but we are promised the help of the Holy Spirit, the indwelling of the Son in whose mystical body we are all members, and all the resources of the Communion of Saints, both those struggling alongside us and those now triumphant. And the Gospel promise is that however far we have fallen, the way of return is open.

*The first reading is 1 Peter 5.5-11; the Gospel is Luke 15.1-10.*