

Daily Devotion for Tuesday, June 23, 2020

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Revelation 2:8-11

⁸ “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of the first and the last, who was dead and came to life:

⁹ “I know your affliction and your poverty, even though you are rich. I know the slander on the part of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. ¹⁰ Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Beware, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison so that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have affliction. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. ¹¹ Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. Whoever conquers will not be harmed by the second death.

If you were looking to today's devotion as a source of immediate joy and light-hearted inspiration, I'm sorry for raining on your parade, but that does not appear to be what is being addressed in our passage from Revelation, the second chapter. This piece of Holy Scripture states, in a rather blunt manner, that the faithful need to prepare themselves for some suffering, testing, and affliction. Happy Tuesday!

Typically, this is the type of reading that I would skip over, in terms of preaching. If this were one of several scripture options presented to me, I would choose another one of the options. This does not mean that I believe that this passage of divine inspiration is bad, it is just that I prefer to surround myself with happy and pleasant things. I like things that make me feel good, especially when it comes to spiritual things. I read the Bible to feel better about the day that lays ahead of me. I pray to be comforted by God. I go to church to feel a sense of joy. This reading does not appear to offer any of those things, at least at first glance. Yet, what happens when we look at the reason, or the intention, behind the words in our lesson? Does that change how we hear it?

The truth about life, that we all unfortunately know, is that there are times when our experience contains very little, to absolutely no, joy and happiness. There are times when suffering, testing, and affliction are the only emotions we feel. What are we to do then? Where is God in the moments that we would like to forget? There are versions of the Church that exist today that want to convince us that being a Christian means that we should always be happy, we should have a smile permanently pasted to our faces, or that we should expect the blessings of God to perpetually shield us from the evil that exists in the world.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, if that is what we are to experience as followers of God, then I must humbly tell you that I am failing. I do not want to give the impression that my life is filled with sadness and pain. But the truth is that I am no stranger to anxiety, depression, suffering, and despair. To think that, on top of all the negativity that I may experience from time to time, that in those most vulnerable moments, that I am also separated from the love of God, is almost too much for me to bear.

We need readings like the one from Revelation 2:8-11. We need divine inspiration that assures us that when we feel the sting of the Adversary, we are not being punished for a lack of faith, we are not being abandoned, but that we are humbly and faithfully living our lives as servants of God. It is good for us to have ears that listen to God's word. In doing so, we hear the words of encouragement that go before us into the places where we would rather not be. “I know”. “Do not be afraid”. “Beware”. “Be faithful”. When we hear these words, we know that we will be ones who conquer, because we belong to the One who has already conquered. Thanks be to God!