

SUFFERING AS A CHRISTIAN
Sermon for the 7th Sunday of Easter, 2026
1 Peter 4:12-19; 5:6-11

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our Second Reading from before: 1 Peter 4:12-19; 5:6-11

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

While here in Australia we aren't likely to be burned at the stake, thrown to the lions, or beheaded anytime soon for confessing the Christian faith, unfortunately, *throughout history we find numerous examples of Christians being put to death.*

In the Apostle Peter's lifetime, Jews who saw Christ as a major threat to their religious beliefs and way of life carried out persecutions against Christians. The same Sanhedrin that had put Jesus to death ensured that the deacon Stephen became the first martyr (Acts 7). After that murder, the floodgates of hatred and persecution were opened, and most Christians were driven from Jerusalem. However, taking their faith with them, they planted new congregations wherever they went. The new centre of the church came to be Antioch in Syria.

At first, the Roman government ignored Christianity, thinking that it was just a weird offshoot of Judaism, which had official permission to exist, but by the time Peter was writing his First Letter, the split between Christianity and Judaism was apparent to all, and Christianity was viewed as a *dangerous and subversive movement*. To encourage the Christians, Peter wrote, "¹² **Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.**"

Peter wrote his Letter from Rome a few years before his death. Persecutions were common here or there, and, as bad as they were, they were confined to small, local events. Often, the persecution took the form of insults. The big prosecutions by the Roman Empire would not start for a couple more years, under the violent and wicked emperor Nero. Peter was anticipating that day by warning his fellow believers, particularly his fellow pastors, that *they needed to be prepared*, and made the point that persecution should not be viewed as *strange*. Rather, persecution is the norm. Those who are of the devil, the world, and the sinful flesh will always hate anyone who trusts in Christ. Look how Christians are treated in the world today, as many countries continue to resist the Gospel.

Even in Australia, persecution of Christians exists. Sure, we are not locked up or sentenced to death—our persecution is not severe—yet what happens when we, or another Christian, speak up for the unborn? Many an outspoken person in the public spotlight is mocked if they are pro-life. And how often are we dismissed by other Christians for not agreeing with their way of thinking, whatever it may be? Yes, sometimes the persecution comes from others who are supposed to be brothers and sisters in Christ.

This seems strange, doesn't it? But God has a purpose in allowing such persecutions. Peter says that through these fiery trials, *we are being tested*. There's the sense here that suffering purifies the Christian. Because we are always sinners and saints, *we are continually being refined*. Christ is always striving to purify our hearts and our minds. In standing firm, we share in Christ's life and death. We suffer and die with Christ. And this fellowship does not end in this life, but continues into eternity, where there is no longer any suffering or death. Remember Peter's words we heard a couple of Sundays ago, "*But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession*" (1 Peter 2:9). We belong to Christ, even in the midst of persecution, yet we continue to be wary because the devil will use

such persecutions to his advantage. Peter reminds us that he “**prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.**”

Usually, a lion will prowl quietly, but the devil here is one who makes a lot of noise. He is letting his frightful roar sound forth. He roars loudly to create fear. His will is that, through much fear of persecution, he would get us to deny Christ. He does not easily attack an entire congregation, but he will single out anyone who seems to offer the best chance for a successful onslaught. The devil “*tries every trick and does not stop until he finally wears us out, so that we either renounce our faith or throw up our hands and put up our feet, becoming indifferent or impatient*” (Large Catechism V 26). Therefore, we need to be “**sober-minded**” and “**watchful.**” This means we should never be carried away by our own or others’ notions. We should never give the devil a chance to devour us.

But God also uses these same fiery trials for *His* purpose. Peter writes, “¹⁴**If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.**” Strange as it may seem, *it’s actually a great blessing to be counted worthy to suffer for the name of Christ.*

However, suffering is not *in itself* to be viewed as a good thing. Peter isn’t speaking of physical ailments or the like here. True, in Peter’s day, persecution was severe, and included floggings, imprisonment, and even being put to death by being fed to the lions in the arena—Peter himself would experience some of these things. But there were other reasons, apart from being a Christian, why these things could be done to a person. Peter is clear to make this distinction when he writes, “**Let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler.**”

If one were a murderer or a thief, they would be punished according to the law. This is not a blessing. This is not a good thing. It is merely *retribution* for committing a crime. Christians should not be criminals. Committing crimes is not how we show love for our neighbour. If one is arrested for being a criminal, this is shameful, and the punishment is just. But if one is arrested for being a Christian, *this is worthy of praise before God.*

Strangely enough, some early Christians took Peter’s words and the words of other apostles so to heart that they would actually *go out of their way to be arrested and put to death in times of persecution*. While suffering for Christ is a great honour for a Christian, it is an honour we cannot seek. The Early Church began to teach that Christians should avoid persecution if they can do so without compromising their faith. It was wrong to be a martyr if one had the opportunity to escape. So, for example, if a person knew Christians were being arrested in his town but not in another, he was to flee. Always, though, *if confronted and arrested, he was to confess Christ.*

Dear friends, we do not *actively seek* out persecution. Again, Peter here is not telling his readers to *put up* with persecution or *take one for the team*. No, here Peter is telling the Christians of that time, and us today, that we are preserved by Christ in the face of trials. When trials come along, we do not preserve ourselves. Christ keeps us safe from true harm. And what is true harm? True harm is denying Christ. We cannot save ourselves. Christ must save us. If we deny Him, we are lost. Peter reminds us that God is also our Creator and is ever faithful to us. Furthermore, Christ Jesus Himself is no stranger to persecution. He gave His life on the cross so that we would never be separated from God. So we can entrust ourselves to God’s care, even in the face of death, and need not lose faith. Rather, “**rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed. ...therefore let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.**” Our sufferings are for but a little while; the glories of heaven last forever.

As we move from the Season of Easter into Pentecost, the so-called Time of the Church, we are reminded that the Christian is always under pressure from the world. The world does not want to confront its own sin or inhumanity. From the time of Peter, beginning with Stephen, to the present day, Christians have been under attack. It is said that more Christians died for Christ in the twentieth century

than in all the previous centuries combined, and the twenty-first century shows no let-up. The persecutions have not ended. They will never end until the return of Christ at the final judgement of this world. The world will be condemned. Those who reject Christ will be rejected by Christ and cast into hell. But those who stand with Christ will remain with Christ forever. There is nothing strange about being persecuted, because Christ, who suffered all, will always be right there with us. We stand with Christ because Christ will stand with us.

We shall not be left to stand on our own. Christ never abandons us, for He is our Creator and Redeemer. He is the God of all grace, the One who will restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish us. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.