

Our Prayer Interpreter Rom 8:26–27 Pent7A 7-23-17

Taken by themselves, these verses are just a lesson on prayer. However, in context, they are Paul's assurance that our Lord knows our needs, and intercedes for us. This is good to know in time of hardships and suffering we endure in this life.

Last week Paul spoke of the suffering that God's children will experience. Then, that meant torture and death by the Roman Emperors and Jewish establishment. It is more widespread and consistent today, not just with swords, but with laws and court decrees and other means of violence.

We suffer not just for our faith, but as a result of what sin has brought to this world. As an illustration of our own situation, Paul points to the planet. He says that God subjected this world to "futility", meaning that it cannot fulfill its intended purpose. Along with humanity, the earth itself was cursed by sin. The ground and the womb give up their fruit with much hardship. God did not intend that farming and childbirth would be called "labor". Weather provides life, but also much destruction. Violence, sickness and death fill the earth.

Yet Paul promises that all the suffering is nothing compared to the glory that will be revealed. In the resurrection the earth will be new, renewed to its pristine glory. Then it will be set free from its decay.

As the earth goes, so goes all who live on it. Sin makes our life futile, as we are unable to live out our intended purpose. But we don't endure our futility without hope. Without hope, we could not be patient. We can be patient knowing that our future glory will not just be in spirit, but in resurrected bodies. We are not doomed to repeat this in a reincarnated body. What futility that would be.

And we have something more than hope. We have the Spirit of God. He searches the depth of our soul, with its conflicts, sorrows and doubts. In our weakness, he comes down in the pit with us and helps us get a grip on life, to walk with us. Luke uses Paul's word for "help" when Martha wants Jesus to tell her sister Mary to "help" her with the housework—to join her in the work. Jesus called the Spirit the Paraclete, one who comes along side to help. Those who have been care receivers from Stephen ministers, home health or hospice workers know what that is like.

What does the Spirit's help look like for us? Paul says the Spirit intercedes for us, because we don't know what to pray for. But how does the Spirit of Jesus know our prayer needs? The author of Hebrews 4:15 says to the persecuted church, "*we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.*" "Tempted" also mean "tested by suffering".

In his suffering Jesus did not sin by complaining against His Father, or by giving into the temptations of the flesh to escape suffering. Thus He is qualified to be what he came to be: The perfect sacrifice to bear our suffering, sorrow, and sins.

God is not just about saving us for eternity, but also about preserving us in this life so we can withstand all assaults on our faith. He promises one day to finally deliver us from all evil, as we pray in the Lord's prayer. However, He does not promise to deliver us from all suffering now, but rather to deliver us *through* it.

Paul suffered a thorn in the flesh and repeatedly asked God to remove it. God answered that His grace was enough. Paul didn't need less trouble, but more trust. And with more trust He and we are able to rejoice in our weakness and wait patiently in hope.

Now who do you know that has the biggest problem with being patient? Small children can masters of impatience. They wanted things now, but have trouble telling us what. Even if they can talk, they will still grunt, groan, and put on tragic dramas to express their impatience. Telling them to use words may just bring more groans. Infants, who really can't use words, require much more understanding and parental patience. We interpret for them.

Paul tells us that we don't need to use words for the Spirit to lift our needs to our all-knowing Father in heaven. He interprets our grunts, groans, and cries and assures us that God knows our needs that we cannot even express or identify. He doesn't correct our prayer, or pray through us. He prays *for* us in words that we do not know.

Even though Jesus taught us what to pray for, our mixed motives, our doubts, our confusion, our incomplete knowledge, and our weakness leave our prayers lacking in faith and focus.

Thanks be to God that His Spirit knows our spirit. What we don't know to ask for he has already asked on our behalf. Thanks be to God that as we experience any type of suffering in this world, our Lord knows our needs and promises to be present in every event and comfort us in each crisis. May these words strengthen your faith today as you patiently await the future glory that will be revealed! Amen.