**A Good Conscience**

Based on [1 Peter 3:13-22](https://biblia.com/books/esv/1Pe3.13-22)

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The Sixth Sunday of Easter

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The central message of today’s Epistle lesson in the role and relationship between suffering and conscience in the Christian life. By nature, we are inclined to avoid suffering at all costs. Though Canada could have, at one time been called a Christian nation, it is no longer so. And this is becoming more and more apparent in, among other things, our social attitude towards suffering. We now recognize a right for people who are suffering terminal sickness to seek a doctor’s assistance in ending their life. We don’t like to suffer and we don’t like to see others suffer and on the face of it this appears to be a right attitude, but there is more to life than avoiding physical suffering.

The central act of God in saving us is found in the passion of the Christ, his only son. The passion of Christ means literally the suffering of Christ. That he was willing and able to endure suffering for our sake is a cause of our deliverance from sin death and the devil. Peter writes, “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.” And this is the love of God that he would have us know and that he would have us share, suffering willingly for the sake of another. God so loved the world that he gave his only son; that means he suffered to lose him. Husbands are called to love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

God promises an eternal paradise and Eden for those who come to him through his son Jesus Christ. This is a place free of all suffering and danger, where every tear is wiped from every eye. There will be no death or dying or strife. Lion will lie down with the lamb and the child will put his hand on the adders den (Isaiah 11:8). It will be a place devoid of suffering, where eternal joys are found. That is our eternal home purchased and won by the precious blood and innocent suffering and death of Christ, who did not avoid suffering, but for the joy that was set before him endured the cross scorning the shame, and is now seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

God promises an eternal paradise, and we are but strangers here in the world. But while we are here, God has more to offer than a promise of paradise to come. Through Jesus Christ and by his Spirit, he gives us a good conscience and peace in this world of suffering. A conscience is an awareness of right and wrong and how you measure up. A troubled conscience leads to despair and more sin. A good conscience is a gift of God, and scripture today instructs us how we are to maintain this peace of conscience, so that we can endure suffering with grace, and live lives consecrated to God until he gives us deliverance to his eternal dwellings.

First, a good conscience comes from being zealous for what is good. Peter writes, “Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness sake, you will be blessed…For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil.”

When suffering comes, it is easy to think “What have I done to deserve this?” Peter turns the question on it’s ear and says, if you have done something to deserve your suffering then your suffering will be all the more difficult to endure. If you lose your spouse because you committed adultery, that should be harder for you to endure than if he or she left you even though you were faithful.

If you suffer you may ask yourself “what have I done to deserve this?” And if you can honestly answer “I’ve done nothing to deserve this” don’t despair, count yourself blessed that God has called you to suffer for a short time to serve his purposes. And all the more so if you suffer for his name’s sake.

This leads to the second point, that a good conscience is preserved when you are always prepared to defend God’s word. Peter writes, “**But in you hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you**.” It is difficult to live in a society that is becoming increasingly more hostile towards Christianity and the black and white truth of God’s Word. Some days, I sit in despair thinking of all the people I come into contact with, share a conversation with at the checkout lane, do business with, who don’t know Christ, and how it seems people are so thin skinned and protective of their beliefs that it is rare to be able to genuinely share the gospel. But every once and a while it happens that conversations lead there, and someone asks me, or you, why you are a Christian. Have no doubt that when that happens God is giving you an opportunity to defend his word, and you will and you should feel ashamed if you are not ready for it, and botch the opportunity to win a soul for Christ.

“Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.” Always be prepared. **Those who are not prepared to give a defense of Christ either avoid the subject themselves, or get impatient and frustrated in trying to teach others about Him.** The reason the Church gathers to hear God’s word at least weekly, the reason she calls all members to be diligent in bible study and to know the catechism by heart is so that you can carry and articulate the assurance you have in Jesus Christ to yourself in time of need, and others to whom God has appointed you to calmly, patiently, and lovingly articulate the faith.

For many of you, the central opportunity for this was or is to be able to do so with your own children who are always asking for such reasons. Parents, the church does not raise your kids in the faith; its purpose is to help you to do so. This is why each section of the catechism, that confirmation students are to know by heart begins with these words, “The Ten Commandments, The Creed, The Lord’s Prayer…”***As the head of the family should teach it in a simple way to his household***.” Many parent have a troubled conscience because their children grow up and out of the faith. **So teach your children the chief parts of Christian doctrine in the home, at mealtime, in the living room, at prayertime before bed, if you are prepared to give a defense whenever your children ask for a reason for the faith that is in you, then you will not be put to shame, but can have a good conscience before God**.

The third, and final point is that a good conscience is maintained when you know to remember your Baptism often and always. Peter writes, “Baptism…now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ…” Our conscience remains clean when we avoid sin and are zealous for what is good. It is clean when we are always ready and able to confess Christ and Christian doctrine in a simple way to those who ask it of us. Even so, we daily sin much and often fail in these things. And so we need salvation and refuge for when we fall short. This refuge is given, not in redoubling our efforts to do good; but rather in turning to the suffering death, and resurrection of Christ. And this is done through remembering your own baptism where your sin was buried in christ’s death, and a new man was raised up in you to walk in righteousness before God and men.

Someone might say, Baptism is God’s doing, not mine. I am baptized whether I remember it or not. This is true, but your baptism does not work to benefit you in this life apart from faith. Flood insurance illustration. In a flood warning, if you have insurance, you need not be anxious if the flood comes. Without the knowledge and remembrance of insurance, you will be anxious and have no peace.

When you are troubled in conscience, you are foremost to turn, not to your resolve to do better next time, but rather to the death and resurrection of Christ. And though he died for all people, and was raised for all people, that death and resurrection was applied to you personally in your baptism, so you can consider it and know that though Christ died for all, not all receive his death to their benefit through faith; but you have and I have, I have been washed cleansed redeemed and saved through baptism, and though I have sinned I repent and can stand before God this very moment with a good conscience, because Christ has taken away my reproach and given me life in his life.

*Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his*. (Romans 6)