

*Archbishop Luke (Voino-Yasenetsky)*

A Word on the Sunday of the Cross. "Take comfort, take comfort, my people"

These words of the ancient prophet Isaiah is addressed to us, your pastors, for on us lies the duty to not only teach you, not only to point out the path to Christ, but show you our heartfelt love and concern for you.

And you, the flock given to me by God, I love as the people closest to me, although I really don't know how many troubles you have, how many tears, shouldn't I comfort you?

And I have tried to fulfill this on this present day, this great day of worship of the cross of Christ.

When we teach you the way to Christ, we always suggest that you remember His words that the gate is narrow and the path is tight to the Kingdom of God and there will be tribulations in the world.

Tribulation – this is the fate of all Christians.

You ask, do only Christians grieve, don't the people of this world who reject the way of Christ endure tribulation, every misfortune and grief, don't they shed tears?

Yes, of course, there is inevitable tribulation for them, but there is a great difference in value in the eyes of God between our sorrow and tears and the tears and sorrow of those who live without God, for they do not endure their sorrows voluntarily but only because they can do nothing about them. They often endure tribulation with curses and grumbling, but we Christians should carry our tribulation, tribulation connected to the name of Christ, not at all like this, but with great submissiveness to the will of God, with gratitude to God for everything that happens to us: for the good, for the difficult, for misfortune and for every one of our sorrows.

We bear our sorrows voluntarily, for if we had been spurned by Christ, if we had been delivered from the majority of tribulation, but those we do not renounce we voluntarily bear, then God will bless us in our suffering, for great is the value of our suffering and our tears in the eyes of God.

As to how worldly people try to get rid of sorrows we know this: they douse their sorrow, their tribulation, with wine and vodka, they cloud their minds with tobacco and even narcotics.

But are we Christians worthy of this? Isn't it extraordinarily low to cloud our minds with wine and tobacco? Oh, this is deeply, deeply unworthy and, God forbid, that anyone of you at any time would resort to this ungodly means of stifling your conscience.

People look for worldly comfort in their tribulation and when they do not find it, then they try to forget about them: they seek entertainment, they occupy themselves with celebrations, visit with one another and chatter.

This will never be for you, for a Christian should not muffle the voice of his conscience but, on the contrary, listen closely to it.

They seek the deadening of their grief in friendship and, especially in the ancient world, friendship was highly valued. And don't you know how hopeless is this reliance on people but not on God?

People look for a much higher level in their spiritual situation, oblivious to their tribulation, their torments, in intense labor, in work. This, of course, is a means of lightening tribulation immeasurably higher than drowning them with wine, than amusements, dances and celebrations. In time, labor deadens grief, but it isn't possible to work continuously, and when the work is done, the voice of conscience begins to appear, and again the deep sorrow rises up. You will not achieve your desire by labor.

The greatest thing in which is found relief is mutual love: love of a spouse, love of parents for children, love for people worthy of love.

All love is blessed, and blessed is this love, but this is the elementary, lowest form of love, because from spousal love, by the path found in it, we should rise to a much higher love toward all people, toward all the unfortunate and toward all of those who suffer: from this, to rise still higher to the third level of love – Divine love, love for God Himself. So you see, unless people attain love for all, Divine love, there is little meaning and love is only for those near to us.

Neither in this nor anywhere will comfort be found for those who look for it where it should not be. Yes, this is so: they are not finding it and they will not find it.

In what exactly, in what is there to find comfort in tribulation? The Holy Prophet David speaks about this: *"Only in God is my soul quieted"*. In God, in God, in the commandments of God he finds comfort. And he is not alone; all of the righteous people of the Old Testament found it, because people then did not know Christ because He still had not come into the world, they found deep comfort in ardent prayer bursting from the heart, in this spiritual contact with God.

They are blessed, these Old Testament righteous people are blessed, but there are immeasurably greater blessings for those who know Christ, who study the commandments of Christ, who elect the way of Christ. Blessed are they who have attained a higher form of comfort – the comfort of Christ Himself given to us, for isn't the deepest and most everlasting comfort hidden in the cross of Christ!

Tell me, if you carry the cross of Christ in your heart, if you often look upon the Crucifixion on the cross with at least a mental gaze, would this not produce a profound impression of deep unrest in your heart? Because what do we see gazing upon the cross of Christ?

We see the Son of God, the Second Face of the Holy Trinity, the Incarnate God, Holiest of the Holy, the Great Saint, Benefactor of generations of mankind, of which the world has never known and will never know again, - we see Him nailed with iron nails to the cross. We see, suffering severely, He Who by one wave of His hand, by one of His words commanded the waves and the winds to subside; He Who, in the short period of His life on earth, created amazing miracles that demonstrated His love, His pity for people. We see hanging on the cross He Who healed all diseases, Who opened the eyes of the blind, Who raised the paralytic from his bed; Who satiated a thousand men with a little bit of bread; Who

resurrected the dead – We see the greatest Benefactor, we see the Savior and Deliverer from the grasp of the devil. For the cross of Christ is frightening, for His sign drives out the demons who run away in terror and panic because an immeasurable torrent of Divine love poured out from His cross, a love wiping out the malice and enmity of the devil and demons.

And just the same, if we see the Expiation of the world on the cross, taking our sins upon Himself, making a sacrifice for all of us accursed ones, this is what our sins are worth, as if there were not many of them, as if they were not grave, what they are worth compared to the drops of tears that flowed down through the palms of His Divine hands, compared to the stream of blood that flowed out of His chest, perforated by a spear, and stained His cross! What are all of our sorrows worth in comparison with this!

And when we are filled with these thoughts and feelings, when with the whole heart, the shocked heart we stare at the cross of Christ, it is only then that we receive true, singularly true comfort.

Then why do we have some other kind of comfort if we have been given this greatest comfort of all! After all, the cross was given to us, the one we are erecting before you, that we are giving to you to kiss. Is this not the greatest form of comfort, do we not derive by continually reading the Holy Scripture great strength from the source of comfort, for the Holy Scripture is full of this comfort – just draw upon it, just return to the Holy Scripture and then receive the one true and eternal comfort.

Delve deeply into the words of the Apostle Paul and remember them: *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God!”* (2 Cor. 1: 3-4).

I testify, with my entire heart I testify to you the deep truth of these words of Paul. I testify through my own experience, because the Lord comforted me in my great sorrow.

I can say, to the extent that as the tribulations of Christ that you have will multiply, so will the comfort of Christ multiply. Remember, remember: to the extent that your sorrow increases so will your comfort increase.

Only Christ can comfort, if only we will seek His comfort, only by the cross of Christ will we drive away cowardice, sorrow, and grumbling.

This is why the cross of Christ is carried out before us in these holy days, in order to call all of you to Him Who was crucified on the cross. With great joy we see how crowds and crowds strive to see the erected cross and to hear the hymn: *“Before Thy cross we bow down, Master”*.

What is this power that draws us? Why are there so many people in God’s church? The invisible power of God, the power of Christ, draws you in order to comfort you, in order to wipe away your tears. And if it is so, then we must try to add to this comfort! Not by us, not by us... But God Himself will govern your hearts with Divine love and the patience of Christ.

Amen.

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