

Grace and peace to you . . .

In this world of shadows, the lines between right and wrong, good and evil, true and false, grow conveniently hazy. But Jesus comes as Light into this shadowy world. That Light shone out in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it, but it did hate it. He, that Light hated by them, loved them. He loved this dark, cruel world perfectly, without cause or condition, without seeming reason or sense. He loved the world and gave His life for it. And yet, the world hated Him, seized Him, abused Him, and crucified Him for it. They hated Him because of His perfect love. It was too perfect, too extreme, too brilliant to behold, and therefore, too inconvenient and way too true.

And so it is that the world hates you who carry that Light, that perfect Love, inside of you. For you carry it not just for yourself, but also for the life of the world. Being a Christian never means being right with God only on the inside, privately or secretly. It always means bursting at the seams with the joy and peace of salvation, eager to share this Great News of God's love for man in Christ Jesus. And thus the world hates Christians who bear the Light, who seek to change the world by offering it Life, even as it hated Christ. You are the sheep. This hateful world is full of wolves. The life of Jesus Christ, His resurrection and His death, is lived out in His disciples. His mission continues. His Word spreads. His martyrs are put to death.

Thus Sts. Simon and Jude, Apostles, martyrs, were sent by Jesus Christ to proclaim the Great News of God's Love to a murderous world full of self-absorption and hate. But in that suffering, through that torture and sorrow, beyond that persecution, they found perfect joy and peace. The Word they preached was also for them. Jesus paid for their sins also, washed them clean, and made them His. His mercy had begotten them anew to a living hope through His resurrection and made them heirs by grace to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away. Though they knew difficulty and hatred on this earth, they knew even better that it would not last, and that they would be kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Though it was tested by fire, their faith was refined, strengthened by power from on high, drawn closer to its source and made perfect. In life, in death, He was their all in all.

And so it is still today. His mission continues. His Word spreads. His martyrs are put to death. You who confess the true faith are mocked and ridiculed and even hated. The world drives on in its blind lust and its hatred of the Truth, with its vain worship of itself and success. Some martyrs bleed on the inside. Their reputations are destroyed. Their names are slandered and betrayed. They die a thousand deaths as former friends, allies, and companions turn their backs in self-preservation, in cowardly hatred along with this world, for a glimmering lie of worldly honor and acceptance, for popularity and success.

What comfort, then, is there for you who suffer quietly for your conviction to the truth, in your hostile workplaces, neighborhoods, schools, and homes? This is your comfort: suffering will not last. Beyond the persecution and pain that you now feel, after the shallow mocking, then shall your salvation and the honor and the glory be revealed. And this is your comfort: you belong to a long line of noble saints, including Simon and Jude and Jeremiah, Apostles and Prophets, housewives and accountants and engineers. You are God's own beloved and precious child. He loves you enough to chastise you and enough to die for you. He will never let you go. He keeps you close to Himself even through this suffering and perfects your faith in it. Your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, will be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. For you, by grace, in mercy, for Christ's sake, are God's own, His beloved, His baptized child! Being hated by men is better than being loved by the devil.

God has made you a saint, like Sts. Simon & Jude. Thus Jesus Christ has also sent you to proclaim the Great News of God's Love to a murderous world full of self-absorption and hate. But in your suffering, through your torture and sorrow, beyond your persecution, you find perfect joy and peace in Christ. The Word you share with friends & neighbors is also for you. Jesus paid also for your sins, washed you clean, and made you His. His mercy has begotten you anew to a living hope through His resurrection and has made you an heir by grace to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away. Though you know difficulty and hatred on this earth, you know even better that it will not last, and that you will be kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Though it is tested by fire, your faith is refined, strengthened by power from on high, drawn closer to its source and made perfect by Christ. In life, in death, He is your all in all.

Sts. Simon and Jude gave their lives in the service of Christ. They died in a foreign land that foreign people like you might know Jesus. They did not love their lives unto death. And now they have their reward. For blessed are the dead who die in the Lord. Soon the angels will sing this also of you. In the meantime, come and eat what He gives: food for suffering saints, Himself, the forgiveness of sins. This will sustain, strengthen, and comfort you. This holy food will give your soul healing and nourish your body, even in the midst of your pain and sorrow. Let the world outside rage in all its hatred. Let the devil shake his fists in fury and frustration. For Jesus Christ has overcome the world and the devil, and He gives that victory to you in His own Body and Blood. So gather here, with all the angels and saints in heaven. Gather around your Champion, your Victor, your Savior from sin and death. Here, in this Supper, you know that, no matter what the world thinks, the Lord your God loves you forever. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes . . .