



Scripture nugget: Peace in the midst of persecution

When we heard this, we and the local residents begged him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul replied, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? I am prepared not only to be bound but even to die in Jerusalem for the Name of the Lord Jesus." Since he would not be dissuaded we let the matter rest, saying, "The Lord's will be done." (Acts 21:12-14).

Perseverance and calm in the face of dangerous persecution. One of the greatest things we can learn from St Paul is perseverance in the face of aggressive persecution. Perseverance in faith is a high virtue that leads a soul surely to its transcendent destiny. Before his profound conversion, St Paul inflicted cruel persecution on the early Christians, putting them in prison and participating in the stoning of St Stephen. After his conversion, St Paul's zeal in persecuting Christians was transformed into holy zeal for spreading the Good News of Christ. However, his great zeal was met with intense hostility and persecution in every city that St Paul visited in his missionary travels. The Jews maliciously charged him with false accusations like overturning the teachings of Moses, inciting riots and rebellion against the Roman authorities. They secretly hatched devious plans to waylay him, ambush him and kill him. They incited riots against him. They tried to persuade the Roman governors to condemn him to death. They doggedly pursued him from city to city. Three times St Paul was beaten with rods, once stoned, three times shipwrecked, and spent a night and a day in the open sea (cf. 2 Corinthians 11:25), yet in the midst of all these adversities, St Paul was undeterred, and went about his mission calmly, covering many cities, staying there with the believers to upbuild their faith, and escaping to another city when it became too dangerous.

The faith that withstands intense persecution and overcomes all unholy fears. We have a good idea of the mindset and faith of St Paul through a study of his epistles to the faith communities he set up. In his letter to the Philippians, he said: *... I even consider everything as a loss because of the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have accepted the loss of all things and I consider them so much rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him... (Philippians 3:8-9).* For St Paul, Christ is everything, and anything outside of and against Christ is worthless. He acknowledges that he has no righteousness apart from Christ (cf. Philippians 3:9). In his letter to the Romans, St Paul says: *If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord (cf. Romans 14:8).* In his second letter to the Corinthians, St Paul exhorts them to walk by their faith and not by their feelings (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:7).

Conversation with Jesus: Precious Lord, You said that when we are persecuted for Your sake, we should jump with joy because our reward in heaven will be great. You also taught us not to fear those that can harm the body but the One Who can cast the soul into eternal damnation. You told us not to worry about what to say in defence when we are brought before our persecutors. You demonstrated through Your martyr saints that the awesome power of God's grace accompanies every moment of persecution. Thus, the eyes of St Stephen beheld the vision of heaven even before he drew his last breath. Give me the faith and perseverance of St Paul so that I can also withstand persecution, and at the end of my life say together with St Paul: I have completed the race successfully, and I now go forward to receive my crown of eternal glory. Mary, Mother of Salvation, pray for me. Thank You, Jesus. Praise You, Jesus.