

Matins: 21st September 2015

Theme: The strong comfort.

Watchword: "Our Saviour, Christ Jesus, has destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." (2Ti 1:10 NIV)

Lamentations 3:22-26.31-32. Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him." The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD. (It is good for a man to bear the yoke while he is young. Let him sit alone in silence, for the LORD has laid it on him. Let him bury his face in the dust-- there may yet be hope. Let him offer his cheek to one who would strike him, and let him be filled with disgrace.) For no one is cast off by the Lord forever. Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love. (Lam 3:22-32 NIV)

Dear friends of our Lord IX: This weeks motto is "The strong comfort" and we have the watchword from 2.Tim.1:10: The Lord is good. His compassions never fail. Great is his faithfulness and his unfailing love. That's why the church remains forever and his saints are never to be written off, but will live with him in eternity. This strong comfort addresses great challenges, because our daily life seems to be so very different. God's people go through deaths dark vale and they're in danger all the way.¹ Read the Introduction to Lamentations and also the short verses from Job 2:11-13. Senzeni na? Necklacing of Benedict Daswa in Tshitani, Limpopo and his beatification last weekend. Militant church: Syria. Discrimination. Persecution. Martyrdom. Expulsion. Refugees. Masses of victims. Compassion fatigue. Hardly enough left to cry over that little boy, who drowned in the Mediterranean – alone, lost, dead.

"Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." (Joh 11:21-22 NIV) Waiting for God: How long? Will you forget me forever? (Ps.13) The adversaries mock and jeer: Where is now your God? Just as

¹ Just think of Israel in Assyrian exile – or in Egyptian slavery before that. Remember the dramatic persecutions of the early Christians in the first centuries under the roman Caesars Nero, Diocletian and Galerius: 10-100k. China, India and Japan in the early days, but also Soviet Russia: 1st five years of the Bolshevik revolution 28 bishops and 1,200 priests were executed

1838, it was estimated that as many as 100,000 people in Imerina (Madagascar) died as a result of the tangena ordeal, constituting roughly 20% of the population. Malagasy Christians remember this period as ny tany maizina, or "the time when the land was dark".

Nazi Germany - Between 1939 and 1945, an estimated 3,000 members, 18% of the Polish clergy, were murdered for suspected ties to the Polish Resistance or left-wing groups, or for sheltering Jews (punishable by death). 6 million Jews in Auschwitz.

The Holy See has reported that over 100,000 Christians are violently killed annually because of some relation to their faith. According to the World Evangelical Alliance, over 200 million Christians are denied fundamental human rights solely because of their faith. Of the 100-200 million Christians under assault, the majority are persecuted in Muslim-dominated nations. Christians suffer numerically more than any other faith groups or groups without faith in the world. Of the world's three largest religions Christians are the most proportionally persecuted with 80% of all acts of religious discrimination being directed at Christians, who only make up 33% of the world's population.

Malaysia/Indonesia - Iran/Afghanistan; Pakistan/India - China/N.Korea; Sudan, Nigeria, Somalia – Egypt, Libya

Vladimir and Estragon waiting in vain for Godot (Samuel Becket). The Latin master Ovid taught us: Hoffen und harren macht manchen zum Narren! (*Fallitur augurio spes bona saepe suo*. Hoping & waiting makes fools of many.) Danny Archer in "Blood Diamonds": "Sometimes I wonder... will God ever forgive us for what we've done to each other? Then I look around and I realize... God left this place a long time ago." Where is your God? Does he not bear the name "Immanuel"? 2 or 3 are gathered in my name. No – "God is dead" (Friedrich Nietzsche) ... and we're left to our own devices and victims of fate. The devils are loose and we're just at the disposal. These powerful war mongers relish that – these dogs of war – hoping that we loose faith, our mind and all in the absurdity of all.

Theology after Auschwitz: Let's pray! Faith is protest against obvious realities and overwhelming odds. Under the cross. In affliction and temptation to loose faith. Victor Frankl: Man's search for meaning (Survival in these death camps) is challenging and a severe trial – tougher than most. The prophet of the Lord Ezekiel is asked by the living God: Do you think these bones can live again? Think of the killing fields – Pol Pot. The beheadings of the so-called enlightened and progressive French revolution. The mass graves of the Rwandan genocide and the German gas chambers. Remember that cremation was for a long time a last protest and outright rebellion of the faithless and godless against the Christian faith of the resurrection of the flesh/Judgement to come/Everlasting life. Standing at the open Grave and seeing your loved ones die – pillars of the church – trusted teachers, pastors and bishops – apostles & prophets like Jeremiah, whose tracks get lost in Egyptian exile.

Still we together with the holy Christian Church called by the Holy Spirit to believe, trust, teach and confess with great unanimity in the words of the Apostolic & Nicene Creed declare the Protest of faith and depend solely on God's promises, his great and unflinching faithfulness and mercy, that is new every morning even beyond the grave and this our time and age.

Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father;
there is no shadow of turning with thee;
thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not;
as thou hast been thou forever will be.

Refrain: Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
all I have needed thy hand hath provided;
great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

Summer and winter and springtime and harvest,
sun, moon and stars in their courses above
join with all nature in manifold witness
to thy great faithfulness, mercy and love. Refrain

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth
thy own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside! Refrain