

March 1, 2017

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Scripture

Hebrews 12:1-14

¹Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, ²looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. ³Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart. ⁴In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. ⁵And you have forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as children — “My child, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, or lose heart when you are punished by him; ⁶ for the Lord disciplines those whom he loves, and chastises every child whom he accepts.” ⁷Endure trials for the sake of discipline. God is treating you as children; for what child is there whom a parent does not discipline? ⁸If you do not have that discipline in which all children share, then you are illegitimate and not his children. ⁹Moreover, we had human parents to discipline us, and we respected them. Should we not be even more willing to be subject to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share his holiness. ¹¹Now, discipline always seems painful rather than pleasant at the time, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. ¹²Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, ¹³and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed. ¹⁴Pursue peace with everyone, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

Devotional

One particularly virulent Lenten temptation is to assume that we are solely responsible for the content and results of any program of spiritual discipline we undertake during this season. If we successfully refrain from indulging in chocolate, alcohol, or whatever we promised God we would avoid, or, in contrast, successfully engage in Bible reading, prayer, or other deeds we promised we would do, then by golly, we think we've had ourselves a pretty good Lent. The danger of a “successful” Lent lies in the growth of our ego rather than growth in humility from a faithful Lent. This passage reminds us that Jesus is the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. We don't initiate or continue this journey alone. A great cloud of witnesses surrounds us—saints who have trod a similar path, sometimes stumbling, sometimes falling flat on their faces—whose prayers and testimonies encourage us to persevere. Trials and difficulties will confront us over the next 40 days—all permitted and some perhaps designed by Christ—to help us develop the peaceful fruit of righteousness and resemble our Savior in his holiness. Let us not lose heart, but rather proceed faithfully, being strengthened and healed as we walk toward Easter.

Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God, you have called into this holy season to journey with the cloud of faithful witnesses from generations past and present. Help us to follow with patience and persistence the path that Christ will set before us, trusting in His righteousness and not our own, that we may obtain the growth and transformation that you alone most desire and design in each of our lives, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.