

Exposition on Psalm 70

by St. Augustine

The sermon emphasizes the voice of the Martyrs, the desire of the Martyrs, and the true desire of the Martyrs, highlighting the importance of relying on God and following Christ.

Scripture: Psalm 69:1, Matthew 5:44, John 12:24, Philippians 3:13, 2 Timothy 4:8

Topics: "Christ's Sacrifice", "Persevering Faith"

Description

St. Augustine preaches about the significance of Christ's sacrifice, comparing Him to a single grain of wheat that multiplies to bring life to many, including the Martyrs who imitate His passion. He emphasizes the unity of believers under Christ, encouraging them to endure persecution with faith and love, following the example of the Martyrs who forgave their enemies and desired their conversion. Augustine urges the congregation to seek God's aid in times of tribulation, to trust in His deliverance, and to avoid becoming complacent or impatient while waiting for His return.

Transcript

1. Thanks to the Corn of wheat, because He willed to die and to be multiplied: thanks to the only Son of God, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who disdained not to undergo our death, in order that He might make us worthy of His life. Behold Him that was single until He went hence; as He said in another Psalm, Single I am until I go hence; for He was a single grain of wheat in such sort as that He had in Himself a great fruitfulness of increase; in how many corns imitating the Passion of Him we exult, when we celebrate the nativities of the Martyrs! Many therefore members of Him, under one Head our Saviour Himself, being bound together in the bond of love and peace (as you judge it fit that you know, for you have often heard), are one man: and of the same, as of one man, the voice is oftentimes heard, in the Psalms, and thus one cries as though it were all, because all in one are one....

2. There is then in this Psalm the voice of men troubled, and so indeed of Martyrs amid sufferings in peril, but relying on their own Head. Let us hear them, and speak with them out of sympathy of heart, though it be not with similarity of suffering. For they are already crowned, we are still in peril: not that such sort of persecutions do vex us as have vexed them, but worse perchance in the midsts of all kinds of so great scandals. For our own times do more abound in that woe, which the Lord cried: Woe to the world because of scandals. Matthew 18:7 And, Because iniquity has abounded, the love of man shall wax cold. Matthew 24:12 For not even that holy Lot at Sodom suffered corporal persecution from any one, or had it been told him that he should not dwell there: Genesis 19:19 the persecution of him were the evil doings of the

Sodomites. Now then that Christ sits in Heaven, now that He is glorified, now that necks of kings are made subject to His yoke, and their brows placed beneath His sign, now that not any one remains to dare openly to trample upon Christians, still, however, we groan amid instruments and singers, still those enemies of the Martyrs, because with words and steel they have no power, with their own wantonness do persecute them. And O that we were sorrowing for Heathens alone: it would be some sort of comfort, to wait for those that not yet have been signed with the Cross of Christ; when they should be signed, and when, by His authority attached, they should cease to be mad. We see besides men wearing on their brow the sign of Him, at the same time on that same brow wearing the shamelessness of wantonness, and on the days and celebrations of the Martyrs not exulting but insulting. And amid these things we groan, and this is our persecution, if there is in us the love which says, Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is scandalized, and I burn not? 2 Corinthians 11:29 Not any servant of God, then, is without persecution: and that is a true saying which the Apostle says, But even all men that will to live godly in Christ, shall suffer persecution. 2 Timothy 3:12 ...

3. O God, to my aid make speed Psalm 69:1. For need we have for an everlasting aid in this world. But when have we not? Now however being in tribulation, let us especially say, O God, to my aid make speed. Let them be confounded and fear that seek my soul. Christ is speaking: whether Head speak or whether Body speak; He is speaking that has said, Why do you persecute Me? Acts 9:4 He is speaking that has said, Inasmuch as you have done it to one of the least of Mine, to Me you have done it. Matthew 25:40 The voice then of this Man is known to be of the whole man, of Head and of Body: that need not often be mentioned, because it is known. Be they confounded, he says, and fear that seek my soul. In another Psalm He says, I was looking unto the right and saw, and there was not one that would know Me: flight has perished from Me, and there is not one to seek out My soul. There of persecutors He says, that there was not one to seek out His soul: but here, Let them be confounded and fear that seek My soul....And where is that which you have heard from your Lord, Love ye your enemies, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that persecute you? Matthew 5:44 Behold you suffer persecution, and curseth them from whom you suffer, how do you imitate the Passions of your Lord that have gone before, hanging on the cross and saying, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. Luke 23:34 To persons saying such things the Martyr replies and says, you have set before me the Lord, saying, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do: understand thou my voice also, in order that it may be yours too: for what have I said concerning mine enemies? Let them be confounded and fear. Already such vengeance has been taken on the enemies of the Martyrs. That Saul that persecuted Stephen, he was confounded and feared. He was breathing out slaughters, he was seeking some to drag and slay: a voice having been heard from above, Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me, Acts 9:4 he was confounded and laid low, and he was raised up to obedience, that had been inflamed unto persecuting. This then the Martyrs desire for their enemies, Let them be confounded and fear. For so long as they are not confounded and fear, they must needs defend their actions: glorious they think themselves, because they hold, because they bind, because they scourge, because they kill, because they dance, because they insult, and because of all these doings they be some time confounded and fear. For if they be confounded, they will also be converted: because converted they cannot be, unless they shall have been confounded and shall have feared. Let us then wish these things to our enemies, let us wish them without fear. Behold I have said, and let me have said it with you, may all that still dance and sing and insult the Martyrs be confounded and fear: at last within these walls confounded may they beat their breasts!

4. Let them be turned away backward and blush that think evil things to me Psalm 69:2. At first there was the assault of them persecuting, now there has remained the malice of them thinking. In fact, there are in

the Church distinct seasons of persecutions following one another. There was made an assault on the Church when kings were persecuting: and because kings had been foretold as to persecute and as to believe, when one had been fulfilled the other was to follow. There came to pass also that which was consequent; kings believed, peace was given to the Church, the Church began to be set in the highest place of dignity, even on this earth, even in this life: but there is not wanting the roar of persecutors, they have turned their assaults into thoughts.

In these thoughts, as in a bottomless pit, the devil has been bound, he roars and breaks not forth. For it has been said concerning these times of the Church, The sinner shall see, and shall be angry. And shall do what? That which he did at first? Drag, bind, smite? He does not this. What then? With his teeth he shall gnash, and shall pine away. And with these men the Martyr is, as it were, angry, and yet for these men the Martyr prays. For in like manner as he has wished well to those men concerning whom he has said, Let them be confounded and fear that seek my soul: so also now, Let them be turned backward, and blush, that think evil things to me.

Wherefore? In order that they may not go before, but follow. For he that censures the Christian religion, and on his own system wills to live, wills as it were to go before Christ, as though He indeed had erred and had been weak and infirm, because He either willed to suffer or could suffer in the hands of the Jews; but that he is a clever man for guarding against all these things; in shunning death, even in basely lying to escape death, and slaying his soul that he may live in body, he thinks himself a man of singular and prudent measures.

He goes before in censuring Christ, in a manner he outstrips Christ: let him believe in Christ, and follow Christ. For that which had been desired but now for persecutors thinking evil things, the same the Lord Himself said to Peter. Now in a certain place Peter willed to go before the Lord....A little before, Blessed are you, Simon Bar-jona, for flesh and blood has not revealed it to you, but My Father which is in Heaven: now in a moment, Go back behind Me, Satan. Matthew 16:23 What is, Go back behind Me?

Follow Me. You will to go before Me, you will to give Me counsel, it is better that thou follow My counsel: this is, go back, go back behind Me. He is silencing one outstripping, in order that he may go backward; and He is calling him Satan, because he wills to go before the Lord. A little before, blessed; now, Satan. Whence a little before, blessed? Because, to you, He says, flesh and blood has not revealed it, but My Father which is in Heaven. Whence now, Satan? Because you savour not, He says, the things which are of God, but the things which are of men.

Let us then that would duly celebrate the nativities of the Martyrs, long for the imitation of the Martyrs; let us not wish to go before the Martyrs, and think ourselves to be of better understanding than they, because we shun sufferings in behalf of righteousness and faith which they shunned not. Therefore be they that think evil things, and in wantonness feed their hearts, turned backward and blush. Let them hear from the Apostle afterwards saying, But what fruit had ye some time in those things at which you now blush?

5. What follows? Let them be turned away immediately blushing, that say to me, Well, well Psalm 69:3. Two are the kinds of persecutors, revilers and flatterers. The tongue of the flatterer does more persecute than the hand of the slayer: for this also the Scripture has called a furnace. Truly when the Scripture was speaking of persecution, it said, Like gold in a furnace it has proved them (speaking of Martyrs being slain), and as the holocaust's victim it has received them. Wisdom 3:6 Hear how even the tongue of flatterers is of such sort: The proving, he says, of silver and of gold is fire; but a man is proved by the

tongue of men praising him. Proverbs 27:21 That is fire, this also is fire: out of both you ought to go forth safe. The censurer has broken you, you have been broken in the furnace like an earthen vessel. The Word has moulded you, and there has come the trial of tribulation: that which has been formed, must needs be seasoned; if it has been well moulded, there has come the fire to strengthen. Whence He said in the Passion, Dried up like a potsherd has been My virtue. For Passion and the furnace of tribulation had made Him stronger....

6. And what comes to pass when they are all turned back and blush, whether it be they that seek my soul, or they that think evil things to me, or they that with perverse and feigned benevolence with tongue would soften the stroke which they inflict, when they shall have been themselves turned away and confounded; there shall come to pass what? Let them exult and be joyous in You: not in me, not in this man or in that man; but in whom they have been made light that were darkness.

Let them exult and be joyous in You, all that seek You Psalm 69:4. One thing it is to seek God, another thing to seek man. Let them be joyous that seek You. They shall not be joyous then that seek themselves, whom You have first sought before they sought You. Not yet did that sheep seek the Shepherd, it had strayed from the flock, and He went down to it; Luke 15:4 He sought it, and carried it back upon His shoulders. Will He despise you, O sheep, seeking Him, who has first sought you despising Him and not seeking Him?

Now then begin thou to seek Him that first has sought you, and has carried you back on His shoulders. Do thou that which He speaks of, They that are My sheep hear My voice, and follow Me. John 10:27 If then you seek Him that first has sought you, and hast become a sheep of His, and you hear the voice of your Shepherd, and followest Him; see what He shows to you of Himself, what of His Body, in order that as to Himself you may not err, as to the Church you may not err, that no one may say to you, that is Christ which is not Christ, or that is the Church which is not the Church.

For many men have said that Christ had no flesh, and that Christ has not risen in His Body: do not thou follow the voices of them. Hear thou the voice of Himself the Shepherd, that was clothed with flesh, in order that He might seek lost flesh. He has risen again, and He says, Handle ye and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see Me have. Luke 24:39 He shows Himself to you, the voice of Him follow thou. He shows also the Church, that no one may deceive you by the name of Church.

It behooved, He says, Christ to suffer, and to rise again from the dead the third day, and that there should be preached repentance and remission of sins through all nations, beginning with Jerusalem. Luke 24:46-47 You have the voice of Your Shepherd, do not thou follow the voice of strangers: John 10:5 and a thief you shall not fear, if you shall have followed the voice of the Shepherd. But how shall you follow? If you shall neither have said to any man, as if it were by his own merit, Well, well: nor shall have heard the same with joy, so that your head be not made fat with the oil of a sinner.

Let all them exult and be joyous in You, that seek You; and let them say-- let them say what, that exult? Be the Lord always magnified! Let all them say this, that exult and seek You. What? Be the Lord always magnified; yea, they that love Your salvation. Not only, Be the Lord magnified; but also, always....A sinner you are, be He magnified in order that He may call; you confess, be He magnified in order that He may forgive: now you live justly, be He magnified in order that He may direct: you persevere even unto the end, be He magnified in order that He may glorify.

Be the Lord, then, always magnified; yea, they love His saving health. For from Him they have salvation, not from themselves. The saving health of the Lord our God, is the Saviour our Lord Jesus Christ: whosoever loves the Saviour, confesses himself to have been made whole; whosoever confesses himself to have been made whole, confesses himself to have been sick. Not their own saving health, as if they could save themselves of themselves: not as it were the saving health of a man, as though by him they could be saved.

Do not, he says, confide in princes, and in the sons of men, in whom there is no safety. Why so? Of the Lord is safety, and upon Your people is Your blessing. 7. Behold, Be the Lord magnified: will you never, will you nowhere? In Him was something, in me nothing: but if in Him is whatsoever I am, be He, not I. But thou then what? But I am needy and poor Psalm 69:5. He is rich, He abounding, He needing nothing. Behold my light, behold whence I am illumined; for I cry, You shall illumine my candle, O Lord.

What then of you? But I am needy and poor. I am like an orphan, my soul is like a widow destitute and desolate: help I seek, always mine infirmity I confess. There have been forgiven me my sins, now I have begun to follow the commandments of God: still, however, I am needy and poor. Why still needy and poor? Because I see another law in my members fighting against the law of my mind. Romans 7:23 Why needy and poor? Because, blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness.

Matthew 5:6 Still I hunger, still I thirst: my fullness has been put off, not taken away. O God, aid me. Most suitably also Lazarus is said to be interpreted, one aided: that needy and poor man, that was transported into the bosom of Abraham; Luke 16:23 and bears the type of the Church, which ought always to confess that she has need of aid. This is true, this is godly. I have said to the Lord, My God You are. Why? For my goods You need not. He needs not us, we need Him: therefore He is truly Lord.

For you are not the very true Lord of your servant: both are men, both needing God. But if you suppose your servant to need you, in order that you may give him bread; thou also needest your servant, in order that he may aid your labours. Each one of you does need the other. Therefore neither of you is truly lord, and neither of you truly servant. Hear thou the true Lord, of whom you are the true servant: I have said to the Lord, My God You are. Why are You Lord? Because my goods You need not? But what of you? But I am needy and poor. Behold the needy and poor: may God feed, may God alleviate, may God aid: O God, he says, aid me.

8. My helper and deliverer are You; O Lord, delay not. You are the helper and deliverer: I need succour, help Thou; entangled I am, deliver Thou. For no one will deliver from entanglings except You. There stand round about us the nooses of various cares, on this side and on that we are torn as it were with thorns and brambles, we walk a narrow way, perchance we have stuck fast in the brambles: let us say to God, You are my deliverer. He that showed us the narrow way, Matthew 7:14 has taught us to follow it....

9. What is, delay not? Because many men say, it is a long time till Christ comes. What then: because we say, delay not, will He come before He has determined to come? What means this prayer, delay not? May not Your coming seem to me to be too long delayed. For to you it seems a long time, to God it seems not long, to whom a thousand years are one day, or the three hours of a watch. But if you shall not have had endurance, late for you it will be: and when to you it shall be late, you will be diverted from Him, and will be like those that were wearied in the desert, and hastened to ask of God the pleasant things which He was reserving for them in the Land; and when there were not given on their journey the pleasant things, whereby perchance they would have been corrupted, they murmured against God, and went back in heart

unto Egypt: to that place whence in body they had been severed, in heart they went back. Do not thou, then, so, do not so: fear the word of the Lord, saying, Remember Lot's wife. Luke 17:32 She too being on the way, but now delivered from the Sodomites, looked back; in the place where she looked back, there she remained: she became a statue of salt, in order to season you. For to you she has been given for an example, in order that you may have sense, may not stop infatuated on the way. Observe her stopping and pass on: observe her looking back, and do thou be reaching forth unto the things before, as Paul was. Philippians 3:13 What is it, not to look back. Of the things behind forgetful, he says. Therefore you follow, being called to the heavenly reward, whereof hereafter you will glory. For the same Apostle says, There remains for me a crown of righteousness, which in that day the Lord, the just Judge, shall render to me. 2 Timothy 4:8

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