

**Fifteenth Sunday: Year A**  
**Holy Ghost & St. Stephen, Shepherd's Bush**

**12 July 2020**

(Is. 55:10-11; Rom. 8:18-23; Mt. 13:1-23)

In my last parish the primary school was dedicated to St. Philip Howard. Each summer we took Year 6 to Arundel Cathedral for Mass at his shrine. St. Philip may have lived 400 years ago, but he isn't that distant. We have two branches of his family here in the parish today.

The heir to an ancient title and vast estates, Philip had the world at his feet. His godmother was the Queen was; his godfather, from whom he took his name, the King of Spain. His family suffered in the religious conflicts convulsing England at the time. But Philip ignored issues of faith, opting for a frivolous life of pleasure. He caused much grief to his wife, Anne Dacre, who, frankly, was a great deal better than him. All she could do was pray for him. And her prayers were heard.

Witnessing St. Edmund Campion's defence of Catholicism at his trial set Philip on the path back to the faith of his fathers. As a Catholic, he was arrested and imprisoned in the Tower of London for the remaining 11 years of his life. The Queen refused permission for Anne to visit. He never saw the son born after his capture. If he renounced his Catholicism, freedom, family and wealth would be his again. But Philip was faithful. He died in the Tower in 1595. Poisoning was suspected. Before he died, he carved graffiti on the wall of his cell. It's still there today. It reads: *Quanto plus afflictionis pro Christo in hoc saeculo, tanto plus gloriae cum Christo in futuro.* 'The more we suffer for Christ in this world, the more glory we shall enjoy with Christ in the world to come.'

It is the same experience and attitude as St. Paul, a prisoner and martyr for the faith himself: 'I think that what we suffer in this life can never be compared to the glory, as yet unrevealed, which is waiting for us.'

Suffering is the great stumbling block to faith for many people. Why, if there is a God Who is good, does He allow people, especially the innocent, to suffer? It's a perfectly

fair question, one we should never dismiss nor minimise. From a purely secular perspective, suffering makes no sense. It points only to an imperfect and unjust world. It suggests the absence of a good and loving God. The world sees suffering as the worst thing that can possibly happen, something to be avoided and ended at all costs. Thus, the growing and misguided pressure for euthanasia.

For the Christian, suffering is equally painful. There are times it can also seem for us mysterious and incomprehensible. But we are fully alive to the existence of evil, moral and physical evil, in the world. Suffering is the consequence of that. Which is not saying that an individual may be suffering for their own misdeeds.

The biggest difference for us is our belief that our own life, the existence of the world itself, is for a purpose, it is heading somewhere. As St. Paul says, ‘creation still retains the hope of being freed, like us, from its slavery to decadence, to enjoy the same freedom and glory as the children of God.’ Paul, like Our Lord Himself, compares the process of salvation, moving towards our destiny, to human childbirth. A woman’s labour pains might be tremendous, but they result in new life.

Christ purchased new life for us at the cost of His Passion and Crucifixion. We cannot begin to comprehend how much He suffered. Yet His suffering is redemptive. It is not pointless, nor merely an example to others. It bought our freedom from eternal death, our reconciliation with God the Father, our hope of heavenly glory. It is the seed which fell to the soil and died, yielding a harvest a hundredfold, and infinitely more.

Christ’s suffering is redemptive. As baptised Christians, we share in His life. That means that our suffering, united to His, offered to Him, can also be redemptive. It can effect real change for the better for ourselves, for others, for the world. Provided it is undertaken with the same motivation as that of Christ – in obedience to the Will of the Father, out of love for others. ‘Greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.’<sup>1</sup> When we are seriously ill, grieving or badly hurt by others, always remember this: where is real love, there will be suffering – but that suffering

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<sup>1</sup> Jn. 15:13

will never be in vain. Suffering embraced with Christ, perhaps after initial frustration and anger, will ultimately bring spiritual growth, spiritual life.

St. Philip Howard came to this realisation, having undergone a profound conversion, affected no doubt in part by the suffering he had previously caused his wife. *Quanto plus afflictionis pro Christo in hoc saeculo, tanto plus gloriae cum Christo in futuro.* ‘The more we suffer for Christ in this world, the more glory we shall enjoy with Christ in the world to come.’