

***Hebrews 4:11-16***

*Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience. For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account. Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

**SOLACE IN SOLITUDE**

Although loneliness is not a part of God's plan for man (last week's column), solitude is a divinely ordained cross for the Christian. Christ experienced this cross in numerous ways. He bore the solitude of rejection: "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not" (John 1:10-11). He bore the solitude of labour: "Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few" (Matthew 9:37). Jesus was burdened with the solitude of devotion: "And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves" (Matthew 21:13). Christ also bore the solitude of circumstances - the cross of calvary: "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matthew 26:39). Is it any wonder that after such experiences of solitude, our Lord sought the solitude of prayer: "so much the more went there a fame abroad of him: and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities. And he (often) withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed" (Luke 5). There, Jesus renewed his strength.

Christians too, are called to bear these same burdens, to experience this same solitude. Jesus said as much to his disciples: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matthew 16:24), "Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with" (Matthew 20:23).

However, for the believer, solitude is more a privilege than a burden. This is so because of the wonderful invitation Jesus extends to each child of God: "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:29-30). The word picture here is that of a double harness oxen yoke. Christ invites each believer to join in this yoke WITH HIM, believing that He will bear all the labour AS THE STRONG ONE, if we but join at his side, as the weak but willing.

As the one who is strong (He is Lord God Almighty), and experienced (he has travelled the road of solitude before), He is sympathetic to our fears, our worries and our weariness as one "touched with the feelings of our infirmities" (Hebrews 4:15). The point He makes is clear, we are never alone in bearing the crosses of solitude. Whether by rejection, labour, devotion or circumstance, the resulting solitude opens a door of opportunity to really get to know the strength of the Lord. Here too, the Christian must "often go to a solitary place and pray", and find "grace to help in a time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

***What is my response:***

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