

Sermon: 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

Text: 1 Peter 4:12-19; 5:6-11

Theme: Practical advices for a Christian behaviour

Goal: Suffering Christians shall show their hope by their behaviour

Dear Friends,

Introduction: When Jesus predicted His suffering, warning His disciples about what would happen to Him and to them, Peter didn't agree with Jesus and rebuked Him: "Never, Lord! This shall never happen to you!" (Mathew 16:22). But after Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension Peter saw that after sufferings comes the glory! God is faithful to His children and His final plan for us is much better than any kind of life we live on this earth, no matter if it is a good life or a suffering life. Peter himself had experienced this in his life and he was ready to go to his heavenly room to enjoy the eternal fellowship with Jesus.

Peter's two letters are written to persecute Christians of the first century. Peter tries to encourage them and to give them some guidelines how to live in an unjust world until the call of God to the eternal rest. These guidelines are applied to us as well. Sometimes we are the only Christian among several people at work or at our gym. Let's look at Peter's advices and see how close or how far we are from this ideal of a Christian behaviour.

*I – "**Humble** yourself under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time."*

Humbleness was not something natural for Peter. He was by nature a very arrogant person; he knew everything better, even rebuking Jesus sometimes. When Jesus gave the extreme example and proof

of humbleness washing the feet of His disciples on Maundy Thursday, Peter didn't accept it and argued with His Master (John 13:6-8).

But Peter had learned what humbleness meant. He put away his old "self" and relied entirely on God. He now teaches his fellows to be humble as well. The book of Proverbs (3:34) says: "The Lord mocks proud mockers, but gives grace to the humble."

Peter is writing to "his fellow elders" too, this is, to the pastors, whom he calls shepherds under the Chief Shepherd, Jesus. At our Fraternal meeting this week, one pastor shared what he had said to his congregation: *I'm not your boss. I'm your servant. But you aren't my boss either. We all have One Boss whom we serve: Jesus!* One of the biggest problem of relationship among people at the church and outside the church – even in the family – is when someone tries to lord over others. Of course we need bosses in a hierarchy in the government, in the factory, in the office, at the church and at home. But when someone is not humble and abuses his authority, problems occur. - To be humble is always a good virtue for a Christian.

II – *"Cast all your **anxiety** on Him (God) because He cares for you."*

When we preached on the Sermon of the Mount some week ago, we highlighted the theme "anxiety" (Matthew 6:25ff). But it's always good to be reminded about God's promises. Paul wrote to the Philippians (4:6,7): "The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your request to God." Anxiety is part of our daily life. But we, as Christians, have the resource of prayer, which others don't have. Our faith leads us to God in moments of anxiety. And even if our heart pulsates faster, our eyes lift up to God, who takes care of us.

When Peter showed his anxiety and asked Jesus: “We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?” (Matthew 19:27), Jesus comforted him with the promise of care in this life and of blessing in the eternal life.

### III – *Be **self-controlled** and **alert**.*

Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit, among “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and gentleness”, as Paul wrote to the Galatians (5:22). Paul also wrote: “Let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled” (1 Thessalonians 5:6). Peter was not a self-controlled person by nature. He was impulsive and always spoke in advance before the other disciples. He had to learn and submit himself to the Holy Spirit to get self-control.

To be alert and to be self-controlled are mentioned together. Maybe Peter was thinking on the night at Gethsemane, when he and the other disciples were not alert during our Lord’s agony when Jesus was praying before He was arrested. Three times Jesus woke them up and asked them: “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation” (Matthew 26:41). Self-control and to be alert is necessary because we have a big enemy, which Peter describes as a lion:

IV – *“Your enemy the devil prowls around like a **roaring lion** looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith.”*

This reminds me of some safaris we did in Kenya. Camping in tents in the midst of the savannah, we could hear the lions roaring, the hyenas laughing, the baboons shouting and other game as well. The masai guards were awake all the night walking around to protect us and the other guests at the camp. Walking out of the tent alone at night was a big risk!

When we are inside God's tent (His Kingdom, His church, His family), we are protected by His holy angels, His guards. But if we venture to go out and walk alone in the darkness, the risk to be attacked by the big enemy is big! Don't risk your life! Stay in the fellowship of your family! Stand firm in the faith and resist the enemy!

Peter concludes his words of encouragement with a blessing and an assurance:

*V – “And the God of grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself **restore** you and **make you strong, firm and steadfast**. To him be power for ever and ever. Amen.”*

There is no doubt about God's promises. We have to cling to them and go forward in our Christian life, in spite of the contrarities, persecutions, difficulties and tests we have to go through. Why can we be so sure of God's promises? Because of Jesus' victory! He went through all the darkest and deepest way of suffering, - even death on the cross – to appear again as The Victor on Easter Sunday!

Whatever way we have to walk along, whatever “valley of the shadow of death” (Psalm 23:4) we have to cross, Jesus opened the way for us and we can cross in confidence knowing there is light at the end of the tunnel. We cannot give up, but we have to hold firm to God's hand, leaded by the Holy Spirit as we practice the Christian virtues in our daily life; and look to Jesus, who surpass everything and is seated at the right hand of God the Father, preparing a place for us.

Ascension was celebrated last Thursday; Pentecost will be celebrated next Sunday. This is the term of our lives: We live by hope in the ascended Jesus and we are strengthened by the Holy Spirit. Amen.