

Tears of Sorrow and Tears of Joy

John 11: 32-44

Today is All Saints' Sunday. The Church has always honored those early witnesses to the Christian faith who have died in the Lord. (The Greek word for "witness" is martyr) All Saints' Sunday is a day to honor and commemorate the witnesses to Christian faith who have died in the Lord.

There is a novel titled, *The Martyr*, written by Richard Kim, a Korean American. Richard Kim came to the United States at the early age of 13, and later wrote his novel, *The Martyr*, reflecting on his early life in North Korea. He was a son of a pastor who had served a church in Pyung Yang in North Korea until the Korean War broke out.

In the first half of the 20th century, Pyung Yang, the capital of North Korea, had been called "the Jerusalem of the Orient" because the city was packed with so many churches, and the atmosphere of the city was so like a Christian city until 1950, up until the Korean War broke out. There were many noted Christian mission schools and Christian leaders in Pyung Yang in early 1940's. When the Korean War broke out in 1950, many Christians fled to South Korea because in the North, severe persecution of Christians by the Communist government authorities became prevalent.

According to the novel, *The Martyr*, however, there still remained Christians, pastors, and devoted church leaders left in Pyung Yang, even after the Korean War. Most of the pastors and church leaders were dragged into prison by the Communist authorities. Pastor Kim, the main figure in the novel, was one of those who were put into prison and freed from prison later. Pastor Kim, though among those who were freed, was reduced to an apparently mentally deranged state for all that people could see, caused by the suffering and torture he endured in the North Korean prison.

After being released from prison, Pastor Kim was treated as a traitor of the Christian faith by the church members because, after being released, Pastor Kim told the people that he was the only one among all the ministers who denied Christ to save his own life. He reported that most of the ministers were killed by the Communist authorities because they refused to deny Christ. After he was freed, Pastor Kim lived as a hermit for a long time, isolated from people, and people treated him as a traitor and coward.

Most people thought that this was a reflection of Pastor Kim's guilty conscience. But, as it turns out, the truth was just the opposite. It turns out that when the ministers were dragged into prison and stood in front of the Communist judge, they were asked whether they would keep professing the Christian faith or not. Most of the ministers in prison recanted their faith, all except Pastor Kim. Interestingly, those who denied their Christian faith were executed by the authorities and Pastor Kim, who persisted in professing the Christian faith, was freed.

The day Pastor Kim learned in prison that most of the other ministers had betrayed the Lord when faced with persecution, he had been in shock. He had been even more shocked to discover that all those who had recanted their faith, hoping to save their lives, had been executed, but he, who had continued to profess his faith in Jesus Christ has been spared by the Communists and set free. When he was freed, he agonized about what to tell of the prison experience to the Christian faithful who still persisted in their faith, underground, even while the Communists continued to persecute them. He decided that he could not tell the truth to the Christian community about the feebleness of faith of the rest of their pastors, who had denied their faith to save their lives. So, Pastor Kim told them a lie, a story opposite of the truth—that he, alone, survived because only he was willing to deny his faith.

When the Christian community heard his story, they immediately memorialized all of the ministers who had been executed in prison to be martyrs. Pastor Kim, however, agonized over his lie. He could not ever tell the truth, he feared, otherwise, all those who continued to follow the Christian faith in North Korea might leave their faith in despair of the betrayal by all of their pastors who had denied Christ and perished in prison.

When this novel was published, many Christians were shocked by the possibility that there were false martyrs memorialized in North Korea. We don't know whether this story was true or fiction, but we can acknowledge that the events in the novel could be possible in human life. This story tells us that there are martyrs hidden and unknown in Christian history.

We don't know all who have lived as true martyrs in Christian history. But, I would like to call "martyrs" any who had been disadvantaged in life because they lived the principles of their faith in this world. In this world, the martyrs might have shed tears of sorrow, but in the world to come, they may shed tears of joy! Jesus said "I will tell you the truth; you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy." That is the final judgment of the Lord. We are to be judged by the Lord in a final judgment; as if divided between the sheep and the goats.

Today's scripture reading, according to the lectionary, Gospel John 11:32-44, is the story about Lazarus who was raised from the dead. The Lord raised Lazarus who had died four days earlier.

A week ago, I visited Wayne and Sheryl's home and read today's scripture reading to share the comfort that Jesus gave us, since they lost their beloved son, Richard Lawrence. Until we have experienced the death of someone close to us, we can never know what death means. I noticed tearing in their eyes, even though they bravely tried to hide their sorrows. It is a very hard thing for parents to keep the sorrow of their children's death in their bosoms. A Korean proverb says, "When parents die, children bury their parents in the grave yard, but when children die, parents bury their children in their bosoms."

I would like to emphasize three things reflecting on the scripture lesson.

There are three kinds of tears in our life. Jesus our Lord gave us comfort by saying, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." Remember that the tears will be used as a lens for seeing the Kingdom of God. God is with those who are weeping. God is listening the crying and provides the way.

First, there is the tear of sorrow or pain in life.

When Mary, sister of Lazarus, wept, the Jews who were her friends also wept, and Jesus also wept, deeply moved in spirit and troubled. It is O.K. to cry when we are sad and troubled. But, do not let this put a "period" in your life. Shedding tears is the emotional expression of sorrow, as well as an expression of extreme of joy. There is no difference between the West and the East in the expressing of sorrow and joy. Shedding tears, in both cultures, is the expression of both extreme sorrow and joy.

There is a sad story of Abraham. He made the mistake of taking a lady, Hagar, as his wife and got through her a son, his first born. But, this created a big problem, breaking the family peace with his wife, Sarah. He promised Sarah that he would let Hagar and her son leave his house. One day, early in the morning, Abraham took some food and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar. He set them on her shoulders, and then sent her off with the boy, who was not the promised son whom God has promised. She and her son went on their way and wandered in the desert of Beersheba.

When the water in the skin was gone, Hagar put her son under one of the bushes. Then, she went off and sat down nearby, about a bowshot away, for she thought, "I cannot watch the boy die." And as she sat there nearby, she began sob. God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation."

Second, there is the tear of repentance or penitence in life.

There was a sound of a rooster crowing nearby Peter when he denied Christ three times in the courtyard. Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken, "Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." And he went outside and wept bitterly.

In Jerusalem, there is a crying wall. When I traveled to the Holy Land in 1996, I saw a huge wall in Jerusalem and people standing in front of the wall leaning their foreheads on the wall. When the people cannot find their ways, and feel hopeless and helpless, they go to the crying wall, and pray, and cry to God. This is the place where people can weep and cry, where God listens.

The tear of repentance is the water that heals our wounded body and soul, and turns into a lens to see the Kingdom of God. Most people seek medicine when they are sick to heal their bodies. But, Christians have used their sickness for the healing of their lives and souls. In this way, the tear of repentance turns into medicine for the soul.

Lastly, there is the tear of joy at the end of life.

Jesus, our Lord, promised his disciples that their grief will turn to joy. Mary had faith in Jesus, our Lord. But she didn't expect that her brother, Lazarus, would arise from death. When she witnesses the scene of the raising of Lazarus, saw her brother walk out of his tomb, she wept again with tears of joy. Never put a "period" in your life, no matter how hard or difficult it has been. Again, just put comma and rest on for the time being. The time will come when God will make your life different.

Jesus manifested in himself, in his death and resurrection, the message of the final judgment in which He will be the judge. Jesus told us, "If a grain of wheat remains without dying and being destroyed, it will remain as a grain. But, when it dies and is destroyed, it will reproduce several hundreds times." We celebrate the Saints and their lives. The Saints, martyrs, were not afraid of death because they believed firmly in eternal life.

On Sunday, April 8, 1945, Dietrich Bonhoeffer was executed by Nazi soldiers. He had been leading a worship service for his fellow prisoners in a World War II death camp. Just as he finished his last prayer, the door flew open, and two guards stepped inside. One of them shouted, "Prisoner Bonhoeffer! Come with us!" Everyone knew what that meant. Bonhoeffer was to be executed; he was to die. As Bonhoeffer walked out toward the gallows, he said to his fellow prisoners, "This is the end, but for me the beginning of life."

Revelation Chapter 21 exhorts us, saying, "Now, the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning, or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."