

Church of God, The Eternal

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Dear Brethren:

Greetings to all of you around the world whom God is preserving through the faith once delivered, from all of us here in Mindanao—the second largest island of the Philippines and seen by many Filipinos as a frontier—a land of promise, evoking images of bounty and with its great resources and beauty has a promise for more future development.

In just a few days we will partake of the 2008 Passover. On the evening of the Passover, A.D. 31, Jesus Christ observed this annual festival to signify His approaching suffering and death. His death was the first event, the first step, in God's great plan for eventually bringing thousands of millions into His divine family. The Passover, the first of God's annual festivals, pictures that event. We were commanded that it be observed every year, with New Testament symbols of unleavened bread and wine, so we would always remember our deliverance from the penalty of eternal death through the great sacrifice of Jesus Christ, "our passover" (1 Corinthians 5:7), who became the New Testament Passover "Lamb" (John 1:29).

The suffering of Jesus Christ was prophesied in chapter 22 of the Book of Psalms:

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? (Psalm 22:1).

But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people. All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him (Psalm 22:6–8).

They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of

death. For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet. I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me. They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture (Psalm 22:13–18).

The vivid description of the suffering of the Messiah—our Savior—is adequately expounded in Lesson 33 of the Ambassador College Bible Correspondence Course.

Scourging was a common punishment in the time of Christ, but in our modern times we have difficulty imagining such cruelty. The victim was stripped to the waist, bent over and tied to a post, and then beaten with a flagellum—a multi-lashed whip made of leather thongs weighted down with broken shards of bone and sharp, jagged pieces of metal. In a Roman scourging, called the "halfway death," the victim was beaten just short of dying from the multiple wounds.

Christ suffered this merciless beating, which tore open His flesh, disfigured Him, and caused Him to bleed from dozens of open gashes and cuts. Even some of His ribs were exposed. Most victims were allowed to recover, but Jesus was not. Like a criminal, He was then forced to carry His own stake, but He was so weakened by His terrible chastisement that He fell under its weight after only a short distance. Outside the city, at the Place of the Skull (Golgotha), Jesus was nailed to the stake.

Crucifixion was the most shameful—and most painful—form of execution. Not only were spikes driven into the hands and feet and the body suspended from these open wounds, but breathing was also agonizingly difficult. Victims would sometimes struggle on their stakes for as long as three days, suffering pain, sunstroke, heat exhaustion and loss of blood, finally dying from muscle exhaustion and suffocation.

Our Savior suffered an incredibly painful, brutal death. And He did this voluntarily. He did this for us.

Jesus' broken body is a vital part of His complete sacrifice for us. Jesus clearly showed that we symbolically must eat His flesh and drink His blood in order to be granted eternal life. Eating His flesh—symbolized by eating a piece of unleavened bread at the Passover service—signifies our willingness to live by Him, to let Him live in us.

The small piece of broken unleavened bread is symbolic of Jesus' broken body given for our physical sins (His promise to be our Healer), and our part or calling to let Him live His life in us through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit which makes us part of the body of Christ—His Church, the begotten Family of God (John 6:56).

If we are to live by Christ, as He said in John 6:57, we must be also partakers of His suffering (Romans 8:17). We must follow Jesus' steps in suffering for the sake of righteousness:

For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls (1 Peter 2:21–25).

When we partake of the unleavened bread at the Passover service, we demonstrate our total commitment to God and His way of life, and our desire to wholeheartedly live by Him and let Him live in us. We also bring to remembrance Christ's stripes, which He received for our transgressions, for our iniquities—realizing that God "hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:5–6).

Christ endured that incredible punishment for a very special reason: He wants us in His Family. He wants us in eternity. He suffered for us—for our sins.

As we contemplated the sufferings of Christ, it stirred the depths of our emotion. We made a dramatic change—a life-altering change.

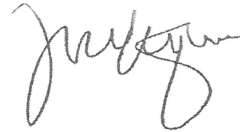
Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy [Spirit] (Acts 2:36–38).

Repentance means changing. It means turning from sin. It means living for God's will, not our wills.

Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God (1 Peter 4:1–2).

We must live to perform God's will. We must rely upon His example to resist sin (Hebrews 12:3). The death of Jesus Christ gave us the determination and drive to live—not for self—but for Him. The Passover helps us endure the trials and tests of life. It will enable us to survive this modern Babylon. His death will not be in vain. It will be of great value—value that will culminate in our eternal life!

Your brother in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mario Y. Roque', written in a cursive style.

Mario Y. Roque