



*The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and there shall no torment touch them. In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die: and their departure is taken for misery, and their going from us to be utter destruction: but they are in peace. For though they be punished in the sight of men, yet is their hope full of immortality. And having been a little chastised, they shall be greatly rewarded: for God proved them, and found them worthy for himself. As gold in the furnace hath he tried them, and received them as a burnt offering. And in the time of their visitation they shall shine, and run to and fro like sparks among the stubble. (Wisdom of Solomon, 3:1-7, KJV)*

How easy is it to despair in today's world? How many people live without hope? In our own country, unemployment is running around 10%, but this only begins to tell the story. This number represents people not working at all but are still actively looking for work. There are other numbers to tell.

Underemployment, meaning those working but not at a salary level sufficient to sustain themselves, runs around another 10% depending on whose figures you use. Then there are those who have simply given up looking for work, perhaps scaling back greatly from a two-wage family to a single-wage family. The media reports that perhaps the recession is lessening, but as usual the ones slowest to recover are at the bottom of the income demographic.

Most of us have probably seen the old movies or looked at books on the Great Depression to see the faces of despair. It took quite a while, but some of those faces have returned in the 21st century. The economic downturn of the last few years has caused a return of despair for many, with those affected hoping sometimes against hope that a miracle will happen. But miracles do not always happen. Workers lose their jobs, families lose their homes and their life-savings to bankruptcy. And yet we know how fortunate even the least among us in the United States are compared to the subsistence-lives of those in many Third World countries, where daily lack of food, water, and shelter are a constant threat to life. The recent earthquake in Haiti is a textbook example of just how fragile the lives of many in poorer countries can be, and how quickly despair can turn to outright tragedy and devastation.

And yet despite these events, hope remains for us. Why? Because we are assured that the suffering many of us undergo in this present age will not compare with the happiness which awaits us when we will be in the presence of the Lord our God. The righteous, those who know the Lord and wait on him, will dance and rejoice in his midst. It is not a proper thing to discard our earthly life to hasten our transformation to our heavenly one. It is right to strive to get out of our troubles so as to be able to help others if we can. If we are not so affected by troubles, it is not only right but indeed our responsibility to ameliorate the suffering of others. But for those who fight the good fight but yet lose that fight: physically, mentally, economically or otherwise, it is always to be kept in mind that God has not abandoned us. Why some struggle mightily and some seem to struggle hardly at all is a mystery known only to God alone. Rather than resentment or envy of others who seem better off, it is better to take comfort in the fact that one day we will all stand before him as equals in his sight, all the righteous together praising him for all time, the travails of the past but a memory. As it says in Revelation (21:3b-4, NIV) "*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.*" Then we will all be precious children in the arms of our Loving Father.

*Father, do not hold it against us for questioning the whys and wherefores of this life. It is the weakness of the flesh which weighs us down. Forgive us for not always trusting in the ultimate good you have ready for us. Help us to appreciate the favor you have shown us and to make us aware of how we can aid those who have even less material support. We yearn for the peace which will only come from you, be it today, tomorrow, or many years from now. Let us be mindful to live in your hope during our journey in this present life. Send us your Holy Spirit to fortify us along the way. Amen*