

The Light Shines in the Darkness (Acts 16:22-34)

You may remember that after Saul's conversion, the Lord told Ananias to go look for a man named Saul, who is praying. Ananias objected by saying, "*Lord, I have heard from many sources about this man, what evil things he has done to your holy ones in Jerusalem*" (Acts 9:13). And the Lord replied, "*Go, for this man is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before Gentiles, kings, and Israelites, and I will show him what he will have to suffer for my name*" (Acts 9:15-16).

In 2 Corinthians 11:23-28, Paul reluctantly provides a resume of his suffering, which include imprisonments, beatings, and near-death experiences. He was whipped with 39 lashes five times, beaten with rods three times, pummeled with stones one time, shipwrecked three times, constantly in danger, endured sleepless nights, often went hungry and thirsty, was cold and exposed to the elements, and suffered anxiety about the well-being of all the churches. The famous Anglican scholar, N.T. Wright once comically said, "Wherever Paul went, there was a riot. Wherever I go, they serve tea."

Today, we hear that Paul is stripped, beaten with rods, and thrown into prison. For Paul, his sufferings are the way in which he is united to Jesus Christ. He will say in 2 Corinthians, "*Though the outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed each day*" (2 Cor. 4:16). In other words, through his suffering the love of the Risen Jesus Christ is manifested.

Notice what Paul and others are doing in prison. Luke tells us, "*At midnight, while Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God as the prisoners listened, there was suddenly such a severe earthquake that the foundations of the jail shook.*" Paul and Silas, beaten and bruised, cold and hungry, are *singing!*" I would love to hear those beautiful hymns that they offered up to God.

With Paul and Silas, we see two faithful men conformed to the passion, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. At every turn of events – no matter how bad – God always brought good out of it. While Paul is condemned, beaten, and thrown in prison, he prays and *sings*. And notice that Luke says the *prisoners listened*. They had to be thinking, "How can you be singing under the circumstances?"

Paul and Silas embody those beautiful words from John's Gospel, "*The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it*" (Jn 1:5). As the Lord was there for Paul and Silas, you can remain confident that he will be there for you and your family as well!

~St. Thérèse, pray for us!