T
he Holy Apostle Peter ended
1 Peter 3 by telling his readers
that, when suffering, we should
remember that Christ too suffered, but is
now at the right hand of God; he begins
chapter four saying that, since Christ
suffered for us in the flesh, we should
likewise serve God through our suffering
by ceasing to sin (4:1-2). We’ve spent
enough time being controlled by our
passions and engaging in “lewdness,
lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking
parties, and abominable idolatries”
(4:3) – in fact, non-Christians will think
us strange and talk against us because
we no longer live in the same way as
them (4:4) – but we must nonetheless
remember that these people will give
an account to Christ for how they’ve
lived (as we will also do) (4:5). This
is the message preached by Christ to
those who died before His Crucifixion
and Resurrection; those who lived
righteously would rise to immortal life
(4:6).

You might wonder: how does Christ’s
death and Resurrection relate to
our overcoming such passions as
lust and idolatry? Venerable Abba
Isaiah answers in this way, “Christ’s
Resurrection became life
and healing from passions
for those who believe on Him, that
they might live in God and bring forth
the fruits of truth.” The key to this, St.
Maximos the Confessor tells us, is love.
The remedy against the passions, St.
Maximos says, is the commandment
of love, and he continues, “Through
genuine love for God we can drive out
the passions. Love for God is this: to
choose Him rather than the world.”

All of this is something that must be
faced with serious prayer because, St. Peter says, “the end
of all things is at hand” (4:7). You
might be put off by this statement, because
nearly 2,000 years has passed since
it was written, but Venerable Bede
warns us not to be flippant about it,
“Peter says this so that you will not be
fooled into thinking that judgment is a
long way off or even that it will never
come. Its timing may be uncertain, as
far as we are concerned, but it is sure
to come sooner or later.”

Part of this serious, attentive, prayerful
life involves lovingly serving each
other (4:8-9). This service involves
using the spiritual gift(s) given to the
Christian by God (you can find more
about the spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians
12-14, Romans 12, and Ephesians
4). Serving in this way is dependent
upon two things: relying upon the
power of God, and giving the
honor to God. Therefore,
a person who preaches
or teaches presents the
words of God for God’s
honor, and likewise a person
who serves others does so
through the empowerment of
God for God’s glory (4:11).

Finally, St. Peter returns to the theme
with which he began the chapter: partaking in Christ’s sufferings. It is not
strange or unexpected that Christians
suffer – we should instead rejoice that
our suffering purifies us and glorifies
God (4:12-16). St. Tikhon of Zadonsk
tells us that this is the true Christian
life, but unfortunately only a few Christians
truly stick with it,

We Christians are disciples as
were the apostles. We must be
followers of both of the teachings
and of the example set by the life of the Master - And what is it then,
to follow Christ? To do good and
to suffer for the sake of the will of
God who desires our forbearance;
to endure all, looking upon Christ
who suffered; for many wish to be
glorified with Christ, yet few seek to
remain with the suffering Christ.

In the end, then, persecution comes to
the Church to purify it – God’s judgment
then moves on to those who do not
obey the gospel of God (4:17-18). True
Christians will therefore commit their
lives in loving service to their Creator
(4:19).

LIFE TIP
Abbot Nazarius of Valaam tells us how we
should see our suffering: “If you love Christ God,
then endure as He endured, and do all that is
pleasing to Him. He taught and did. Unfailingly
your love also should be such as does good, en-
dures, is disturbed by nothing present, and in
everything ever thanks Him not with words and
tongue, but with very deeds. You must love Him
with heart, with mind, with your whole soul,
strength, and mind.”