

Commentary to the 33 Ordinary Time (C)



By Patient Endurance You Will Live.

Today's gospel begins with the disciples marveling at the glory of the Temple. It must have been something to see. The Temple they looked at was one of the wonders of the world. It was brand, spanking new. It had taken fifty years for Herod to rebuild the Temple. This Herod was the Herod who lived at the time of Jesus' birth, not the Herod at the time of the Passion of the Lord. The original Temple, the Temple that Solomon built, was destroyed by the Babylonians at the beginning of the captivity in 588 BC. When the Israelite returned to Jerusalem around 528, the people had all to do to build shelters for themselves. It took about fifteen years for them to begin to build a new Temple.

This was modest undertaking, merely adequate, but the best the people at the time could do. As the centuries progressed, this temple was enlarged and refurbished, but it never approached the magnificence of the Temple that Solomon built. In the year 26 B.C. Herod decided to restore the Temple to the Glory of Solomon's Day. The work on the Temple had just been completed when Jesus' disciples looked on amazed at the precious stones and votive offerings. Have you ever gone to a majestic Cathedral or Basilica? Perhaps you have visited the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, DC, or maybe you have been blessed to be able to travel to Rome and go to the Basilica of St. Peter.

I remember the first time I went into St. Peters. My jaw dropped. It is amazing. That's how the disciples felt when they looked at the Temple. Then Jesus said to them, "It really doesn't matter. It is all going to come to a ruin anyway." In fact within forty years the Romans would put down the Jewish Barsabbus revolt, and, to break the spirit of the zealot rebels, would completely destroy the temple leaving nothing but what we now call the Wailing Wall still standing. Jesus prophesied that the Temple would be demolished. He then goes on to say that the whole world will be destroyed. He says that natural disasters, earthquakes and hurricanes, and political turmoil demonstrate that the world is coming to an end.

At the same time he says that when you see these things, know that the end is still in the future. Jesus says that there will be many claiming that the end is at hand. In fact, every few years someone pops up with a list of why the world is going to end at a specific time. Remember what Jesus says: "Ignore them." Jesus is adamant that we Christians are not to get flustered, distraught, or full of anxiety. These are the feelings of those who refuse to commit their lives to the Kingdom of God. What we need to do is to give witness to Christ, particularly in the face of persecution.

The Lord was not just addressing the early Christians when he said that you will be delivered up to those who will murder you for being faithful. He was also talking to Archbishop Oscar Romero, Jane Donovan and the Maryknoll sisters and the six Jesuits who were all murdered in El Salvador for demanding that the poor be treated with respect. He was talking to Maximilian Kolbe and all the religious leaders particularly from Poland as well as many parts of Europe who were put to death by Nazis and Communists during the last blood stained century. He was talking to the Catholics and other Christians who are being persecuted and killed right now in Egypt, the Sudan, Israel, Iran, Iraq, sections of India and throughout the world. And He is talking to everyone of us who is mocked for hanging on to what the media presents as a dated morality. When Jesus spoke about persecution, He pointed His words to all of us who fight for traditional family values and responsibility against those that deify self-gratification. All people, from the martyrs of the past to those living in your house, may be put to death, or at least commit social suicide for their Christian witness, but patient endurance will save their lives. Patient endurance will save our lives.

That phrase, "patient endurance" is the New Testament catch word for martyrdom. By patient endurance we will be saved. By becoming martyrs we will be saved. We Christians are called to martyrdom. That is the challenging part of today's Gospel. We must become witnesses to Jesus Christ, martyrs, to be saved. Affirming our Christianity demands suffering. All Christians experience this in many ways. Perhaps you tell your 19 year old daughter that it is not right for her to move in with Beaufort, and you get treated with scorn for having such "archaic morals". Or perhaps you don't accept a position that would certainly benefit your family financially but would eliminate all family time. Then the character next door who is home once a month for a few days buys a boat. His children tell yours about the great time they had water skiing. The world and those who live by its values may appear to be winning.

But their victories are hollow, their lives are shallow. Through patient endurance of all this and more, you are saving your life. The Temple that was built in Jerusalem might be destroyed, but the Temple that is the Life of Christ within us will never be destroyed. In the sixth chapter of the Book of Revelation the Book of God's plan for mankind is brought forward, sealed with seven seals. When the fifth seal is opened the voice of the martyrs cries out from their place underneath the altar, the place where the blood of sacrificial animals was caught. "How Long, O Lord, How Long?" they shriek. Our pleas join theirs. "How long, O Lord, how long do we have to keep on suffering while evil doers prosper? When will the world see the purpose of our suffering? When will we be vindicated? Lord, I'm trying my best and I don't seem to be getting anything but ridicule. How about that guy next door who never puts you first yet keeps advancing in the world? He makes me look like a fool. When are you going to come to show the world why I suffered?"

And the voice of the Lord rings out: "In a little while, a little while longer. But first more need to be added to your number. I am waiting for more people to give witness." Today's gospel is challenging. It

is challenging because Jesus demands that we give witness, become martyrs, if we want to be saved. It is challenging because the Lord demands that we stand up for him, his kingdom and the Christian way of life in a materialistic, self-centered world. It is challenging because it demands that we accept grief from those who mock us. It is challenging because it proclaims that only by patient endurance can we be saved. This is the challenge of Christianity. We pray today for the grace to endure patiently any trials that are essential to our affirmation of Jesus Christ.

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