

## Matthew 10:21-33

*“He who endures to the end,”* says Jesus, *“will be saved.”* But what’s to endure? Well, yes, we do put up with illnesses, life’s troubles, and the basic problems that come with growing older. But all this cannot be what Jesus has in mind, can it?

No. Enduring life is not what Jesus means here. He speaks of enduring persecution. He speaks of sharp division that will arise within families; *brother delivering brother to death*, He says; *the father his child, and parents being put to death by their own children*. He speaks of being hated by all because of Him; of being maligned and ridiculed. Things we hear of, but hardly see with our own eyes; painful sufferings Christians endure in other parts of the world, but not here where we live, work, and play.

So when Jesus says, *“Do not fear those who can kill the body,”* we have to scratch our heads to try to recall the last time we had such fear. And for most of us, we have never been afraid in this way. And so our response to Jesus’ words in our text may be something like: God has preserved me from such suffering and persecution.

But maybe not. Maybe we should word our response a little differently. Not, “God has preserved me,” but “I have preserved myself from such suffering and persecution.” How so? This is how: by being lukewarm in confessing Christ before others.

Could it be that here in America; right here where we live, we do not suffer as other Christians do, not because of God’s grace necessarily, but because we are not very bold at all in acknowledging Jesus?

We do not live in a monastery. We are not surrounded by people who think, act, and believe as we do. And there is a lot of anger out there among many of these people. Anger over politics, yes, but all this anger is really against God because no authority exists apart from Him. If you want to lose friends quickly, bring up politics or religion; bring up abortion and how God has been pro-life from the beginning; bring up homosexuality versus God’s design for marriage; bring up what Jesus says - that no one goes to heaven apart from Him. So we don’t. Rather, we talk Cardinal’s baseball, the weather, our summer plans, “how’s the family?” and things like this.

Now if you get beat up over politics, that’s not persecution. But if you lose a friend discussing Jesus with them, that is. But we like our friends. We like to be popular in school. We don’t want to be labeled as fanatics. And so we keep Jesus to ourself. But then, we are not those, are we, who endure to the end? We simply choose not to endure at all. We choose to be lukewarm.

Here’s what St. Paul says about this in 2 Timothy: *“All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”* Not some...*all*. So where is your persecution? And where is mine? Maybe the persecution is not there because our lives are not the godly lives we think they are. Perhaps we do not have division in our family because we do not make Jesus the dividing line. Perhaps we are not hated by those who hate Jesus because we value their love and friendship more than we value Jesus.

Martin Luther spoke of a nightmare he had. It gave him motivation to stand strong against persecution. It was Judgment Day, and God demanded of him, "Why were you more afraid of them than of Me!"

For us, it may be more of this question: "Why did you love them more than Me!" We tell the whole world that we're friends with someone on Facebook, but we don't tell a soul that Jesus is our friend. We may even go to the trouble of hiding this from some if we think they will laugh at us or un-friend us. How can we endure to the end if we don't really have anything to endure?

Jesus endured to the end. He had everything to endure. He was hated. He was maligned and ridiculed. He was persecuted to the point of death on a cross. And you know why? Because He chose not to be lukewarm about you. He loved you, and He told the whole world that He loved you. He acknowledged you freely. He was not ashamed to be called your Friend, your Servant, your Savior.

Now you and I can choose to ignore this...as most do. We can choose to bury this somewhere in the back of our mind. But it does not change what Jesus did for you. He loved you even when you were un-friending Him. He died for you while you and I were looking the other way and ignoring Him. He does not want us to be lukewarm about Him. It hurts Him deeply. But He endures that also. He patiently, gently calls and invites us to repent; and to see His face smiling on us.

Yes, Jesus, right now, is smiling on you. It's not our goodness that causes Him to smile; it's His love, His love for you. God's love for you is not a rollercoaster ride, up and down, depending on whether we are hot, cold, or lukewarm. His love is constant. Because of His love, He knows the exact number of hairs on your head - because He cares. Even something like that, so insignificant, is important to Him. Because it's you. It's your head; your hairs.

There is no friend in your life like Jesus. He is your best Friend forever. He loves you. He loves your family. And He wants so badly for you and your family not to be lukewarm about Him, but to have Him at the center of your home; the center of your life.

This will cause persecution in some way, shape, or form. But He will help you endure. And *he who endures to the end*, He says, *will be saved*.

Today on this altar there sits the Sacrament. This is how we endure. We cannot endure on our own. We need Him who endured to the end to come inside of us and dwell there. This is how. Through bread and wine Jesus enters into you. Here is real forgiveness for you. You have been lukewarm, and so have I. Here is God's mercy and pardon for you. God forgives you. This is the pledge of His forgiveness placed into your very mouth. This is assurance and certainty. Through this week, Jesus helps you endure as He lives within you. And next Sunday you come again to receive Him who endured for you, and He will continue to help you endure to the end so that you will be saved. Amen.