

One measure of a person's character is shown by what it is that impresses the person. The disciples, in our text, are impressed by the "*wonderful stones and wonderful buildings*" in the temple at Jerusalem. So impressed are they, that they share their wonderment with Jesus. And why wouldn't He be impressed as well? Some of these massive stones in the temple measure thirty-seven feet long, eighteen feet wide, twelve feet high, and are overlaid with pure gold. What on earth can compare to this impressive structure?

Yet Jesus is not impressed. "*Do you see these great buildings,*" He replies, "*There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.*" This took place about forty years later when Jerusalem and the temple were utterly destroyed.

So, what does impress Jesus? We have to back up a few verses from where our text picks up. In these verses, while they are in the temple, Jesus calls His disciples to Himself to point out a poor widow who had just put her last penny, two small copper coins, into the offering box. He is not impressed by those who are putting in large contributions. But with her He is greatly impressed. "*For they all contributed out of their abundance,*" He tells the disciples, "*but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.*"

This impresses Jesus. Yet maybe not us so much. We side with the disciples. We are impressed by quantity, material quantity. But Jesus is impressed by quality, spiritual quality. "*His delight is not in the strength of the horse, nor His pleasure in the legs of a man,*" the psalmist writes, "*but the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear Him, in those who hope in His steadfast love.*"

It comes down to these words of Jesus, which we have heard three times today, twice in our Introit, and once at the end of our Gospel reading. "*The one who endures to the end will be saved.*" That temple, as impressive as it is to the disciples, will not endure. Not even one stone will be left upon another. It will become a heap of ruins.

Pick out anything in this world today that impresses you. A lofty mountain peak, a canyon so grand that it takes your breath away, a building standing tall and majestic, a tree beautiful with color. Jesus' words apply to all of these. Not one of these will remain. In forty years maybe. Perhaps sooner, perhaps later, all such material things will be destroyed.

But what about us? When Jesus says, "*the one who endures to the end will be saved,*" He is not talking about things; He is talking about people. And even more to the point, He is speaking of His people, Christian people. "*The Christian,*" we could say, "*who endures to the end will be saved.*"

Should this concern us? Even frighten us? No. It's not as though God begins us in our journey in the faith, but then leaves it up to us to finish it to the end. The writer of Hebrews points out that Jesus is both the "*author and the finisher of our faith.*"

And He truly knows how to finish. He is the One who endured to the end. No one faced more opposition. No one was more hated. What Jesus endured is beyond our comprehension. On the cross, how easy it would have been for Him to call upon the angels to come and deliver Him. Yet

no such word came from His mouth. No such thought even entered His head. When Jesus began His journey, He knew that He would most certainly finish it. And thus, He cried as He died, "*It is finished!*"

Take comfort in this. Jesus, who is the author and finisher of your faith, knows how to finish what He begins. He did not begin your journey in your baptism only to let go of you in the end. He completes what He starts. No, not all will be saved in the end. But if this is your concern, then take heart. To be concerned is a sure sign that Jesus is at work in you to bring you through to the end.

And here we learn much from that poor widow. She did not know how she would endure in life. She had no means of support. All she had was one penny. Yet even this she gives to the Lord. How impressive! She is, as the psalmist writes, "the one in whom the Lord takes pleasure, for she fears Him and hopes in His steadfast love."

This widow teaches us how to endure to the end. By turning it over to the Lord. We are as bankrupt spiritually as was this woman materially. And we must be to endure to the end. We must be "*poor in spirit,*" in complete and utter poverty. If we think we can endure to the end because of who we are and how strong we are, we will not endure. But, like the temple, we will become a heap of ruins.

Jesus is not at all impressed by strength, but by weakness. "*When I am weak,*" writes St. Paul, "*then I am strong.*" And so with you and me. We need to confess that far too often we are impressed with ourselves. But why should we boast if we are truly weak? To endure to the end and be saved, let us be the poor widow and give everything over to Jesus. We will not endure without Him. But in Christ we will.

Do not be concerned if Jesus is impressed with you or not. Rather, rejoice that He forgives you. And forgive you He does. Each and everyone of you. He does not want you to come to ruin. He wants you to endure to the end. Because He who was hated by all, truly loves you. He who was delivered over to death is, for you, life now and forever.

Jesus is the one, and the only one who endured to the end. And therefore, He alone has salvation. And this salvation He gives to you in your baptism where you have the assurance that your sins are forgiven, and where there is the forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation. And so you, yes you, will endure with Jesus and be saved. Amen.