

Jesus does not paint a pretty picture for His disciples. Wars, famines, earthquakes, false Christs leading many astray. All these taking place around them. Arrests, trials, beatings, hatred, and worse being done to them. All the disciples want to know is when the stones of the temple will be thrown down. Jesus does not answer when; He answers what – what they will have to endure.

Their “what” is not necessarily your “what.” Wars, famines, and earthquakes do take place in the world in which we live. False Christs continue to lead many astray. But when was the last time the religious authorities came and hauled you off to be beaten and flogged? This is taking place as I speak; Christians suffering persecution in various places. This is what God is laying upon them to endure. But this is not what God has laid upon you to endure. At least, not now. In fact, our lives seem rather pleasant compared to what the twelve disciples would face, and what some disciples are facing today.

And so, this question comes to my mind: are we even enduring? Is there anything that we must endure? Jesus says, “*The one who endures to the end, this is the one who will be saved.*” Are we thinking: “Piece of cake! Endure to the end? Sure! What’s to endure?”

Have you ever wondered if you could endure persecutions? Make no mistake about it. The world is hostile to the Christian Faith. If that hostility were to come to us, and in a severe way, would we endure to the end?

There are Christians, even among us here, who are not gambling with their salvation. They are taking the necessary measures to ensure that they would endure. They are faithfully in the Word of God. They read it, they study it, they hear it read, hear it preached by the one God has called to be their pastor and teacher. This is wisdom. This is, as St. Paul puts it, “*working out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you.*”

But many would argue that these Christians are pretty extreme; that they are preparing for something, persecution in this case, which will probably never come.

Yeah, maybe not. God knows. But that’s beside the point. Jesus says, “*The one who endures to the end, this is the one who will be saved.*” And my point is this: at least they are enduring. They are enduring something. They are enduring the unknown, not knowing if and when persecution will come.

There are relatively few Christians who have to endure hardship and suffering because they are Christian. Most Christians, and that includes us at the present time, are called upon to endure, not persecution, but the exact opposite. A life filled with good things, pleasant things. A life not torn by war or uprooted by earthquake or famine. A life without fear and trembling, where the hostile world leaves us alone. This, at the present time, is what we are called upon to endure.

Let me use this analogy. When you are driving on a highway, which is more difficult to endure: stormy weather, or a peaceful, sunny day? Some would say that you endure the first, but you enjoy the second. No, my friends, both must be endured. Both require paying close attention to

the road. In the storm because of the rain and wind. And in the good weather because when all is calm, it is so easy to lose focus on the road.

Right now, you are driving in good weather. You are not called upon to endure the storm of harsh persecution. What you are called upon to endure is this long stretch of highway in your life in which it is so easy to say: "This is a piece of cake! Endure this to the end? Sure! What's to endure?"

And here's what happens, because I see it happening here. Even while some are not gambling with their salvation, keeping their eyes on the road, keeping as their focus the Word of God, Holy Baptism, Holy Communion, others are not. The road in life is easy and pleasant right now. And it's too tempting to enjoy the drive and not pay close attention to God's preached Word and to His Sacrament on the altar.

Friends, Jesus did not endure the suffering of the cross so that we would lose focus and miss out on the salvation He won there for us. He wants all His Christians to endure to the end. And so, He must, now and then, put a storm in our path. He must do this so that our eyes are brought back to the road.

Most of you know what I mean. You have had these storms come to you. And I know that, even though they make driving difficult, you are grateful for them. You see, now, how God put the storm in your path to bring you back to Him, back to the Divine Service here in His house, back to His Holy Supper for you, back to your baptism into Jesus Christ.

Some, maybe most of you, have loved ones enduring storms right now. Thank God for these storms. He knows what we all need most to keep our eyes on the road. He uses, sometimes severe storms of various kinds, to keep His beloved sheep enduring to the end. And there will never come a time when we will no longer need such stormy weather now and then. We are all weak. We are all sinful. We all become distracted in our driving. Not one of us would endure to the end. It's by God's grace alone that we will endure to the end and will be saved.

Now, do not think that if you have not been enduring well, that God is finished with you. Why do you think He brought you here today? To punish you with guilt? No! To announce to you His great mercy. He forgives you for how you have driven your road in the past. He forgives you for taking your focus off your Lord Jesus Christ. He forgives all of you for all of it.

Here is His forgiveness in this Holy Meal. As you come forward to the altar, He puts your eyes back on the road. He places Jesus Christ before you. The One who endured for you. The One who helped His disciples to endure, and who promises to help you endure to the end so that you, with all His faithful ones, will be saved. Amen.