

Holding On Until the End

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year C

Malachi 3:19-20a
Psalm 98:5-6, 7-8, 9

2 Thessalonians 3:7-12
Luke 21:5-19

One of the fascinating characteristics of epic fantasy stories, in which there is a heroic battle between good and evil, is that the reader always knows in the end good will ultimately triumph – yet they endure the story anyway! Shortly after the release of the fourth Harry Potter novel (and the first movie) I asked a group of children why they were so anxious for the next three novels to come out. After all, the stories can be rather scary and intense, and we know in the end good will ultimately triumph over evil. Why do we even need the other stories? Their answer was simple, but profound – we want to see *how* the good side wins! Not knowing how the story will pan out, they were willing to endure the scariness and suspense so that they could experience the triumphant ending. When, in 2007, the last of the Harry Potter novels was released, readers everywhere were finally rewarded for their faithfulness to the franchise and their perseverance in sticking with the story until the final resolution in which (spoiler alert!) good did indeed triumph over evil. Despite the intensity, and often scariness of the story, and the length of the last few books, readers endured to see *how* it would end.

The Gospel reading for the 33rd Sunday is one that can be a little disturbing to hear – particularly if (with a little added

moxie) it is read with all the vigor of an Old Testament prophet! It is not a Gospel of peace and comfort, but of judgment and dismay. We do not hear of tranquility, but of persecution, even by family and friends. We do not hear of rest, but of labor to the point of exhaustion. We do not hear of a Messiah and King, but of false leaders seeking to trap us by telling us what we want to hear, or frightening us into following their spurious direction.

As people of faith we are assured of Christ's immanent triumph manifested in the final ushering in of the kingdom. However, if our Gospel reading were the mission statement of Christianity, it is unlikely very many would follow, especially in this age of feel-good religion and the building up of self-esteem. How many of us would sign up for such things, much less intro-

duce them to our children? How many would be willing to endure such trials so as to see the salvation promised by Christ?

Yet, such may be the feelings of those who suffer extreme or terminal illness, who are tempted to end it all prematurely by euthanasia. Such may be the feeling of our brothers and sisters in faith who suffer persecution throughout the world, the very persecution Christ promises in the Gospel, tempted to deny their faith in order to save their own or their family's lives. Such may

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Christ's Eschatological Discourse

be the feeling of children whose families are facing divorce or tragedy, tempted to doubt even a loving God when the stability they once had at home falls apart. Such were the fears and uncertainties felt by the disciples of Christ at sunset on Good Friday – their faith no doubt challenged by such a disgraceful downfall.

Christ promises trials and tribulations, not at the end of the world, but here and now as part of being his followers. He also promises that at the proper time we will be given what we need in order to endure; words and wisdom that will enable us to bear such trials with a patient resolve, grace to resist the temptation to cower and hide in the face of fear, grace to endure the trials and struggles that will come.

Jesus promised that he has overcome

the world and we believe that His Death and Resurrection have brought us salvation. In that faith, Gospels such as today's and the trials they promise do not discourage, but rather encourage us – to pray for the grace to endure, to eagerly hold on to the end, and so see the salvation promised us by Christ whereby our souls are saved. It is that endurance that will help us to see salvation; if only we don't give up, but rather hold on to the end; if only we face our trials willingly, with full confidence that God's goodness will triumph, and with eager anticipation and unrelenting excitement to see just *how* God will bring that salvation about.

Fr. William Nicholas
November 16, 2007

