

Your endurance will win you your lives (Luke 21 5-19)

If Jesus was wanting to recruit people for his mission, he surely had an unusual way of bringing them in. He warns them that they will face wars and revolutions, earthquakes, plagues and famines. He tells them they will be seized , and persecuted and imprisoned. They will be betrayed, even by parents and brothers and friends, and some of them will be put to death !!

Its hard to imagine anyone wanting to volunteer for this sort of mission. And yet he tells them that they can endure these difficulties and their endurance will win them life.

In todays homily I would like to reflect upon endurance in the Christian life. . I wonder how many people here have participated in endurance type activities.? Has anyone run a marathon. Has anyone undertaken a great long trek. Has anyone experienced long periods of separation from their loved ones. Has anyone endured having a family member or friend with a long-term serious illness. Some of us may have endured a number of challenges without realizing how well we have endured.

Actually, all of us will be required to endure difficult long term challenges in our lives. We can develop some practical strategies for enduring, but there are spiritual dimensions to this as well.

In June and July , my wife Lynne and I undertook to walk the Camino pilgrimage to Santiago in Spain. It was an endurance event . We spent 16 days with packs our backs and walking through the mountains of Spain. We walked about 25 km every day. We got blisters, were rained upon regularly, we experienced extremes of temperature and were very sore at the end of every day. But day by day, we found the strength to continue on to Santiago, the burial place of St. James, one of the early apostles of Jesus. To our surprise though, we found other pilgrims along the way, who had walked much further than us. Most had been walking for one month, some had walked for three months. We marveled and were inspired by their endurance. We met one man who was running for spiritual and charitable reasons , a marathon of approximately 42 km a day , every day for 6 months ,from his home in Holland, to Rome , to Santaigo and then back to Holland .

How do people complete, such amazing feats of endurance. For some, it involves having the mindset of living just one day at a time. For others, it is the inspiration of knowing that many others have achieved this before, and so we should have confidence to achieve it also. Most people, endure because they are in the company of companions with them, who are able to share their strengths and weaknesses, and their needs and gifts. Of course, we know that there is a spiritual dimension to endurance as well. Jesus assures us that he will be with us, that his Holy Spirit will be in us, and give us strength. He assures us that the power of God will be behind us. I have an encouraging little quote in my office that says : “**the task ahead of us, is never as great as the power behind us.”**

In our gospel today. Jesus was wanting to encourage the early disciples to be people who developed a mindset of endurance. He did not want them to give up. He knew in advance that there would be extreme challenges for them. He didn't want to hide this fact from them but was upfront, advising them of the obstacles on their journey. By the time that St. Luke was recording this gospel in written form, the Christian community were suffering extreme persecution. They had seen all of the predictions of Jesus come true and there seemed little relief in sight. The marvelous temple that Herod had restored, had once again been destroyed. They had no evidence to indicate that they would survive or even that Christianity would survive other than the oral promises of Jesus, that their endurance would win them life. We can imagine that some dropped out under the pressure. But clearly, many did endure, lived by faith, and grew strong through their times of trial, such that the Christian community grew and spread. And of course it has developed into this wonderful worldwide movement that we are blessed with today.

I just want to encourage you that you too, can endure whatever challenge life throws at you, through the power of the Holy Spirit, that is available to you. My own life experience has been that living the Christian life will see us experience many challenges, trials and difficulties. Even today, we can expect to be persecuted, and we can be betrayed - even by those we love. But we can endure all things through Christ, who will strengthen us.

I am conscious that today, we have the invitation to support the annual Centacare appeal. In the bulletin Fr Neal comments to us, that many people, are enduring significant problems in our own society. They shouldn't have to do that alone. As I indicated before, one of the ways that we can endure - is through the support of others, who will help us along the way. Centacare is an outstanding Christian ministry in our society. If you get the Catholic leader today, you will see the many dimensions of how Centacare reaches out to people struggling with heavy burdens. Centacare provides pastoral services to people in hospital, and in prisons and to seafarers. It provides counseling and relationship education, dispute resolution, support to adults and children with disabilities. It provides a whole range of aged care facilities and services, employment services and childcare. The extent of Centacares, compassionate outreach into the community is truly outstanding. We should be proud to acknowledge that the Executive Director of Centacare Mr Peter Sellwood, is one of our parishioners, and we have quite a number of other parishioners who work and minister in Centacare programs. Thank you to the staff of Centacare. Please support Centacare financially.

So in closing, today, we must acknowledge the reality, that life will include for all of us, a range of challenges that will test us. Of course, Jesus wants us to develop endurance in meeting these challenges, and we need to have the confidence that we can endure whatever comes our way as people of God. One day you will look back and realize that your challenges have made you stronger and, your endurance has won you life.