

Jesus says to his disciples today, “Not a hair on your heads will perish!” This is definitely good news for us, and the gospel should be good news. After all Jesus has just warned the people about the destruction of the temple, about earthquakes, famines, wars, dreadful portents in the sky and all kinds of disasters.

As I was thinking about this promise of Jesus, I remembered a humorous column in the newspaper where a reader had sent in a whole collection of entries from church signs and bulletins that didn’t quite come out the way they were supposed to. One of the entries that I was reminded of by today’s gospel was the church sign that read “Don’t let worry kill you! Let the Church help!”

Now I think it meant let the church help you get over your worry NOT let the church help have more to worry about ... but after today’s gospel it seems that the church has given us plenty to worry about.

Being persecuted by our friends, betrayed by our family, even put to death; it doesn’t seem to go with “Not a hair on your head will perish!” But Jesus doesn’t think like we think, and God’s plan isn’t always something we can understand. God takes the long-term view and assures us that in the end, even after life is over, we do not have to worry because even after terrible things have happened we will not perish, we will survive for eternity with him in heaven.

Of course, after Jesus says, “Not a hair on your head will perish”, he then says, “By your endurance you will gain your souls!” I knew there was a catch!

We have to endure. Endure is a word that tells us that it won't necessarily be pleasant. No one talks about having to endure a party, or having to endure a second helping of your favorite food, or having to endure the company of someone you love.

Endure comes from the Latin words "In" which means the same as English, "in" or "inside" and "Dur" which means hard! To endure means to put up with those things that are hard for us inside, hard to suffer. And endurance means that if we have hardened ourselves to put up with things then we will last through them, instead of being worn away like something soft.

We all know how to gain endurance. The formula is very simple, we have to practice, regularly, every day, all the time. Now there's a lazy part to all of us, and for that part of us, this message is not good news. We want things to be easy. We want to be able to get the rewards without the effort, but it just doesn't work like that.

Our whole culture and society in North America seems dedicated to making everything easy, no endurance required. We all want to lose weight and get in shape in only three minutes a day with a magic exerciser. We want "A"s in school without doing the homework. We want to win the race without having to run the laps.

But in our heart of hearts we know the easy ways don't work, that the real answer is to endure some work to achieve the result. Even the commercials that promise instant results don't remind you that you have to do it every day – forever - if you want to keep the results.

We also want to know not just how hard it will be but “How long do I have to put up with it, how long do I have to endure?” Young children ask “Are we there yet?” Or “Is mass over yet?” Maybe even some older people are saying “Is this homily over yet?” Young people groan and say, “How long do I have to go to school before I can be free!” And when we get out of school we say, “How long do I have to work until I retire!” and so on and so on.

We spend a lot of time worrying about the future but Jesus tells us we don't have to worry about that - just live today the way we should, practice and we will endure. We will be saved.

A lot of people have spent years and years trying to figure out how long it will be before Jesus arrives for the second time. Even though Jesus himself tells us we will never know, we stubbornly try to figure it out. We want the easy way because if we knew that Jesus was coming back next Wednesday at 11:00 am we could do whatever we want until Tuesday night and then go to Confession on Wednesday morning.

We wait for Jesus' return and we have to go through a lot to get there. We have to endure; we have to build up our endurance. To have the strength to pray when times are tough, we need to pray when times are good, every day.

If we want to be ready to sacrifice when we are called to, then we need to participate in the sacrifice of the mass regularly, every week or oftener so that there is a strong part of us, ready to endure. If we want Jesus to be strong in our heart then we have to receive him in the Eucharist often, as we do here today when we come forward to receive communion.

We are strengthened by the other sacraments too. Today, some young people in our parish will present themselves to enroll for the sacrament of confirmation, a sacrament that bestows the gifts of the holy spirit, especially courage when we are challenged about our faith and wisdom and right judgment so that we can testify and find the words to defend our faith as Jesus told us today in the gospel.

Then, through our practice, through our regular devotion and prayer, through the strengthening of our spiritual muscle by the sacraments in the same way that we strengthen our physical muscles, we will be ready to endure the troubles and the wait.

We need to look at our lives and the little things we do every day. How many of them are devoted to our selfish comforts and how many are designed to help us endure the hard times that must come in everyone's life. Jesus has shown how to live, through love and sharing and caring and sacrificing and enduring, now – in the present moment.

As we draw near to the time of preparation for Christmas, we often fantasize about the stuff we will get from others, but sharing and caring as Jesus did means taking each opportunity we can, like our "Giving Tree" here, to sacrifice for others as well.

We need to endure, to put up with the little hardships and be faithful and regular in our prayers and devotions and then we will know for sure that we have the promise of Jesus that it will all be worth it - for not a hair on our head will perish and we will truly gain the everlasting life we seek for our souls.