

33<sup>RD</sup> SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME – YEAR C

During times of ease we can easily forget the challenge of following Christ - the challenge of carrying His cross and sharing in His sufferings.

As we approach the end of each liturgical year the scriptures focus on the, 'second coming of Christ,' and the tribulations that will precede His return. Our Gospel today does not make for easy listening. Jesus speaks of many tribulations that must come to pass, before he returns in glory.

Whatever challenges the future may hold I would suggest this passage speaks as much about the challenges we face today as it does of those we may face in the future.

The starkness of Jesus' words, remind us of how challenging it is to follow Christ. As the world rejected Him, so it will reject us. In every age, in one part of the world or another, the Church has faced tribulation and endured persecution. Many of our brothers and sisters, both at home and around the world, have made the ultimate sacrifice for the faith. Countless others today, continue to endure persecution because of their faith in, and loyalty to, Christ.

During a recent hearing in Washington D.C., addressing the persecution of Christians by governments worldwide, speakers lamented that, "Christians remain the most persecuted religious group in the world." (Rep. Christopher Smith)

Tribulation comes in many forms. For many it takes the form of external persecution while for others the tribulation is an internal one.

This internal tribulation comes to us in the form of personal suffering. Suffering due to; illness and infirmity; bereavement and loss; isolation and loneliness; as well as spiritual barrenness. In the course of every person's life they will suffer such tribulations. For some, such tribulations cause their trust in Christ to be darkened by a spirit of hopelessness and despair.

During these times we might feel as though God is nowhere to be found. When we are persecuted by doubts and even despair, we must remember that we are never alone; Jesus is *always* with us, even if we cannot feel His presence.

In our tribulations we must focus 'steadfastly on Jesus,' learning from His example how to live with suffering and tribulation. Jesus trusted that the Father would never abandon Him, regardless how grim the circumstances He faced. Jesus had perfect trust in His Father's faithfulness. He knew that nothing could separate Him from His Father love, and that the cross would not be the final chapter of His story.

Therefore, during the times when we are assailed by tribulation, Jesus asks that we persevere in faith and in hope because, in the words of today's Gospel, "your endurance will win you your lives."