

Persevering to the end

Homily for November 25th 2020

When he was seven years old, his family was forced out of their home on a legal technicality, and he had to work to help support them. At age nine, his mother died. At twenty-two, he lost his job as a store clerk. He wanted to go to law school, but his education wasn't good enough. At twenty-three, he went into debt to become a partner in a small store. At twenty-six, his business partner died, leaving him a huge debt that took years to repay. At twenty-eight, after courting a girl for four years, he asked her to marry him. She said no. At thirty-seven, on his third try, he was elected to Congress, but two years later, he failed to be re-elected. At forty-one, his four-year-old son died. At forty-five, he ran for the Senate and lost. At forty-seven, he failed as the vice-presidential candidate. At forty-nine, he ran for the Senate again and lost. At fifty-one, he was elected president of the United States. His name was Abraham Lincoln, a man many consider the greatest leaders in history, a leadership cut short by his assassination on April 14, 1865, and 3 months after he began his second term.

The example of Lincoln's life illustrates something our Lord says at the end to today's Gospel:

By your endurance you will gain your souls.

Today I just want to consider this one verse with you. I came across this helpful definition of endurance:

courageous endurance purposefully defies evil. Unlike patience, it thus has an active content. It includes active and energetic resistance to hostile power, though with no assertion of the success of this resistance.¹

We see this displayed in the Gospel where those to whom Jesus is speaking will experience great turmoil, opposition and even the act of being murdered, like Abraham Lincoln. The basic idea of this word "endurance" in the New Testament is the attitude of our faith orientated to the goal of "gaining our souls". Over against a hostile world, we wait confidently for the fulfilment of the kingdom and our own salvation. That is why it is a word full of energy calling us to active participation. There are two other places in the Gospels where this word is used. One is earlier in Luke, at the conclusion of the Parable of the Sower:

And as for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bring forth fruit with endurance.²

¹ Hauck, F. (1964–). [μένω, ἐμ-, παρα-, περι-, προσμένω, μονή, ὑπομένω, ὑπομονή](#). G. Kittel, G. W. Bromiley, & G. Friedrich (Eds.), *Theological dictionary of the New Testament* (electronic ed., Vol. 4, pp. 581–582). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

² [The Holy Bible](#). (2006). (Revised Standard Version; Second Catholic Edition, Lk 8:15). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

The third reference is in the Gospel of Mark, where it is a similar setting to Luke's words in today's text.

By your endurance you will gain your lives.³

It is interesting here that rather than “gaining our souls”, it is “gaining our lives”. This implies the life focused on an enduring faith will enrich our lives so we will discover the meaning and purpose for our lives.

I was talking on the weekend with two young women in their late 20s. One of them had no faith background at all, and the second a very superficial relationship with the Church. Both had experienced the world devoid of God and therefore absent of any deeper meaning. As they began to explore Catholicism, they are so to speak gaining their lives. Why? This is really interesting. They both said that the ethical teaching of the Church makes sense to them and is giving to them a meaning and direction they had not previously known.

To live so as to conform our life to that of Christ does take endurance because there are those who in various way will actively oppose the Church and her life. Now interestingly Lincoln was not a man of deep religious faith – but he had purpose for living that helped him to surmount great challenges.

As people of faith, we have the encouragement and call of Jesus who wants us to live so as to deepen in our faith through the love of His word; so we gain our lives, and in the end gain our souls.

³ [*The Holy Bible*](#). (2006). (Revised Standard Version; Second Catholic Edition, Lk 21:19). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.