

**THIRTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIMES
YEAR C November 15, 2013**

THEME: Earthquakes, famines and plagues

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When two-hundred-mile an hour winds slammed against their windows and threw everything and anything not tied down at their homes and apartments,

...when twenty-foot high tidal waves inundated land hundreds of yards from the shore washing ships and boats and cars with its terrible force,

The people of the Philippine islands perhaps thought the end of the world had come.

For as many thousands, it had.

For many others, when they emerged after the typhoon had passed and they saw the utter destruction that lay all around them and they began to account the number of the dead, perhaps they began to wish that it had been the end of the world.

For them, for the survivors, the dreadful task was doing exactly that: surviving; grieving and rebuilding would have to wait.

Because of television we now share in the anguish of our brothers and sisters enduring a typhoon in the Philippines, or a tsunami in Japan, raging forest fires in Colorado, an earthquake in Haiti, a civil war in Syria, a famine in Darfur.

We help out as we can with our prayers and a check or cash to Catholic Relief Services.

But we know these events, natural disasters or man-made ones, are not the end of the world, at least not so far.

They are the tribulations and turmoil that must be endured as part of life on this planet, as part of being human.

At least that seems to be part of the meaning in one of the final sections of Luke's Gospel before the passion of Jesus where we find him teaching in the Temple area.

Some in his audience marveled aloud at the sheer beauty of the magnificent Temple built by King Herod.

Yet, by the time Luke wrote his Gospel both he and his readers knew that the Roman armies had totally destroyed that gorgeous Temple, tearing down stone by stone, and killing off virtually the entire population of the city of Jerusalem – a event surpassing in death and destructive scope even the Philippine typhoon.

Similarly, the Christian community in the city of Rome itself and in other places had been decimated by persecutions ordered by the Emperor.

The Emperor Nero took the great founding Apostles Peter and Paul.

Other early Christians he threw to wild animals for the entertainment of fans in the Roman circus.

Still others he crucified, drenched in oil and then set afire as torches in his Imperial Gardens.

Thus, the issues of persecution and destruction addressed by Jesus in the Lucan text today were not idle conversation for his hearers or readers.

They may seem so for us, however.

The Philipines, Japan, Haiti, Syria: all of these are a long way off.

We can write our check; say our prayer for them; turn off the television and go to bed, safe and secure.

Thus far, thanks be to God, our lives have not been touched by the sorts of disasters our brothers and sisters in these places have faced.

Nor have we had to face persecution for our face the way say, Catholics in Nigeria, are.

In Nigeria, Catholics go to mass on Sunday not knowing if their church will be a target of bombing that weekend.

In Egypt, Coptic Christian can be sprayed with gunfire as they emerge from worship.

Neither is likely to happen here this weekend; we are indeed blest or fortunate.

Yet, the final word of Jesus remains as applicable to us as to our sisters and brothers in the Philippines or in Nigeria:

“By your perseverance you will secure your lives.”

Our perseverance is in the choices and decisions of everyday life – our homes, marriages, families and work.

Our choices to live the way of Jesus in how we act toward others,
In how we spend our time and our money,
In how we treat the least among us and the stranger.

Do we persevere in living the life style, the way of Jesus?

Our circumstances and that faced by our Catholic brothers and sisters in the Philippines today are radically unlike, the challenges before us demand vastly dissimilar skills.

But perseverance in faith and hope, perseverance in our trust in God’s presence with us, in God’s Spirit guiding us, enlightening us, is essential to our lives as disciples of Jesus.

The word of Christ to us and to our sisters and brothers of the Philippines this Lord’s Day is the same: **“By your perseverance you will secure your lives.”**