

## **Thirty Third Sunday of the Year November 13, 2016**

Malachi 3:19-20a; 2 Thessalonians 3:7-12; Luke 21:5-19

On this second last Sunday of the Church's liturgical year, we are called upon to reflect on the Day of Judgment and the end times and the importance of the endurance. In today's Gospel Jesus assures the Apostles that he will be with them no matter what hardships they face. He teaches them that authentic Christian living is about meeting the challenges of the day and not of just thinking when the end will come. The Gospel presents us the scene where Jesus and his disciples were looking at Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, at the object of his mission. The disciples were looking with admiration their beautiful artistic Temple of Jerusalem. Jesus then spoke of its destruction and told them that not a stone would remain on the other. This would certainly have shocked his disciples. Jesus uses this episode to teach about the end of the world to come and about the persecutions the disciples will have to endure. In the Old Testament the Prophets generally referred to the Justice of God and to a lesser extent on Mercy and forgiveness. Hence we have the harsh words of the prophet Malachi in the first reading speaking to the stubborn Israelites about their destruction. But the prophet is confident that those who are faithful to God will be saved. In the second reading St Paul advises the people of Thessalonica to work hard and be an example for others and to earn their livelihood by working peacefully and quietly as they prepare for the day of the Lord. He reminds the people how he supported himself by his hard work. They are called upon to imitate Paul and stop bothering others.

In the First Reading prophet Malachi addresses the perennial problem, namely, why do evildoers prosper and the just suffer. What is the value of living just and pious life when the irreligious people look down on the observance of the law? The prophet tells them that the end of the world and the judgment will be terrible for the evil doer but joy for the faithful. He says that it will be bad news for those who have led lives of pure self-interest and sacrificed others for it. They chose to go their own way without God and God will allow them to continue doing so. But for those who have based their lives on being loyal to Truth and have spent their lives in the service of their God and seeking the well-being of their brothers and sisters, the sun of righteousness will shine out with healing in its rays. In other words, the prophet says that the evildoers will be wiped off the face of the earth. When they die, there will be no tombstone to mark their graves. The prophet assures them that God himself speaks of the Day of Judgment for the wicked. On that day the tree will be completely consumed by fire. Even the root will be

reduced to ashes and will have no chance to survive. But for those who serve God the light of the day of the Lord will be welcome like the rising sun. Its rays will bring healing rather than harm. Those who revere God, the Lord shall raise them, sanctify them and carry them to a safe place where no harm shall ever come to them. This refuge is Heaven, the safe place where the Lord rules forever as the Shepherd.

In the Second Reading from the Second Letter of Paul to the Thessalonians, we have Paul's harsh words for those who fall short of imitating the saints, their brothers and sisters in Christ. Admonishing the disorderly, Paul tells them that if they were unwilling to work, they should not eat. Here Paul commands and exhorts in the Lord to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. Paul gives them his own example to show how he toiled day and night to earn his livelihood and never depended on them. Even though he did his ministry and worked for the people of God he lived by his own hard work. Every Christian, when he is able to do so, must support himself and not live off the income or wealth of others. At that time some of the faithful believed that Jesus was about to return at any time to establish His Kingdom. They understood that it is much easier just to wait for Jesus to arrive and then all the problems of the world would be resolved. Paul felt that by living in such idleness, they were bored with themselves and they had become busybodies, occupying their time with small talk, rumours, hearsay, slander, all of these things leading to disharmony and division. Because of their disorderly lives that disturbed others, they neglected fruitful work for the glory of the Lord. Paul being concerned about the community and the misunderstanding of the teaching of the Lord wants simply to re-establish the order and overcome the dissipation that had set in.

The Gospel of today begins with Jesus commenting on the Temple of Jerusalem, a building which was one of the wonders of the ancient world. The beautiful decoration of the Temple had begun about forty six years before Jesus by Herod the Great, to establish his friendly relationship with the people by doing the restoration work. The art work was so wonderful that some of the huge granite stones in the Temple walls were so expertly linked without mortar that they could not see the joints. The Sun reflecting from the Temple's brilliant marble and gold ornament, set on a hill, made it visible for miles. Some people were commenting on its "fine stonework and votive offerings". The Temple of Herod as it was called was one of the most massive buildings in its time and was not yet fully completed. It was the heart and pride of all Jewish life; the very symbol of God's presence among them. Yet Jesus tells his hearers, "All these things you are staring at now –

the time will come when not a single stone will be left on another: everything will be destroyed.” They must have looked at him with absolute astonishment. They could not in fact conceive an idea of the destruction of a massive building in the near future, which was the centre of their faith. The Temple was completed in 63 A.D. and was destroyed seven years later, forty years after Jesus spoke of its destruction. Yet Jesus says that the Temple and Jerusalem will be destroyed but the end will not be as yet. He warns them against false messiahs who would tell them that the end is near. But they are not to listen to them. Historically the destruction of the Temple took place in the year 70 A.D. The Roman army invaded Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple killing thousands of rebellious Jews and taking a large number into slavery. They took away whatever valuables they could get. The treasures of the Temple were carried off in triumph by the Romans.

Jesus warns his followers not to be deceived. Christian life is to focus on the here and now and that will require strength and faith. The world will continue with wars and insurrections and there will continue to be natural disasters that defy explanation. None of these things necessarily means that the world is coming to an end. The teaching of Jesus does not offer us a way to predict the end of the world. Instead, the teaching of Jesus provides his followers with the spiritual resources needed to cope with the adversity and hardship that is part of life in the here and now. The final portion of the passage is directed to the disciples and sets forth what they can expect in the future. If they commit themselves to the Gospel and the life it proclaims, they will find themselves persecuted by authorities and others. The truth of the Gospel will be tested and the faith of the disciples will be confirmed, not in the idle speculation about the end of the world, but in the trials and adversities of daily life. According to Jesus a successful follower is not one who can predict the future. The authentic follower of Jesus is the one who lives out the call of Jesus for love and obedience in the here and now and perseveres till the end.

Indeed the Gospel of today tells us about the fall of Jerusalem. While Jesus was speaking of the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple, those who were with were associating this event with the arrival of the Kingdom of God on earth. Many of Jesus' followers recognized Him as the Messiah and they wanted to crown Him as their King. So when Jesus spoke of destruction or anything that could be associated with war, his followers assumed that the day was near when Jesus would rule over them and the Roman domination would come to an end. They did not and could not comprehend the mission of Jesus and that the Kingdom of Jesus was not of this world. The Kingdom that he preached was a spiritual

kingdom. Jesus while telling the disciples of the events to come tells them also that while waiting for these great moments to come, they must persevere in their living faith and in their fidelity to him.

As Jesus says that in the presence of such events people will come forward identifying themselves to be the long-awaited Messiah. Some others would begin to proclaim that 'The end is near'. But Jesus says such people are not to be trusted and must be ignored. He also tells them that there would be many other terrible things which should take place, namely wars and revolutions, natural disasters, famines, endemic diseases, earthquakes but none of them would be the real sign of the end. The time for the Lord has not yet come for the final judgment. Still less, these things must not be seen as signs of God's anger or vengeance. Our God is not a God of vengeance or does not take revenge. There are many explanations why natural disasters take place in this universe. At the same time we notice there are other disasters which destroy the lives of people and we need to look deeper into them, namely greed, envy, hatred and fear which dominate peoples' lives. But Jesus says something more to his own followers that there are some special things in store for them and they must not be surprised at them. He speaks of the possible persecution and hatred which people will show towards them. All these things that Jesus foretold have been realized not only in the very early Church through the persecutions but down the centuries to our own day. The Lord tells his disciples that people will seize them and persecute them and they will hand them over to the synagogues and to imprisonment, and bring them before kings and governors because of his name. He consoles them saying that this will be their opportunity to bear witness for him and he promises to be with them as their support.

When Jesus speaks of the persecutions awaiting his disciples, he consoles them saying that they should not be anxious about how they are to behave or what they are to say in such times. He even gives them the confidence and tells them that they are not even to prepare their defence, because Jesus himself will give them eloquence and a wisdom that none of their opponents will be able to resist or contradict. In the scriptures and in the history of the church there is abundance of evidence that this promise of Jesus has been kept. We have seen in the world and even in recent times how Catholics have been able to respond to their adversaries regarding the persecution because of their belief in Christ. The disciples of Jesus in fact have come out from this experience stronger than ever. Yet the most difficult thing for us Christians is that we may be rejected or, worse, betrayed by our own nearest and dearest persons. It is difficult to be told that our lives, based on truth, love and justice for all, will bring down on us so much hatred. Yet the

message of Jesus is loud and clear. He tells us strongly that we ought to remain close to him and be firm in our faith and the ultimate victory will be ours. This is not simply a utopian promise. It means that in the long run Truth, Love and Justice will prevail. A review of the history of the past centuries, in spite of all that has gone wrong, has shown continuing progress in all areas of human values. Christianity and persecution will go hand in hand.

Today, like yesterday and tomorrow, the Church follows her Lord: each day, the Christian is invited to bear his Cross and follow Jesus on the way that leads to Heaven. The disciple is not greater than the Master! If the Lord Jesus underwent the trial of the Cross, the Church must also undergo this trial. This is why Jesus says: "This will be a time for you to bear testimony." But it is precisely because the Church follows Christ that the Church is already resurrected with Christ: it is because of this hope through which she is already resurrected that the Church can worthily give testimony of her faith and of her love for the Saviour of men! Our eternal future will depend on whether we listen to his call today as tomorrow can be too late. He is there waiting for us not as much as a judge but as a person concerned about each one of us. The best way to respond is to remain prepared for the coming of the Master.

The Gospel tells us that we are to get ready for that day when God will call us to himself. Our faith tells us that there is no need to live in fear and anxiety regarding the future. Rather, we are to focus on the present time, on today, the here and now. Jesus promises his followers abundant sufferings and persecutions. If they bear the sufferings for Christ's name they will earn the true life, the eternal life of heaven. For this reason the church wants to examine ourselves today regarding the response we have to such circumstances. We are invited to seek and find him in all things, in every person, in every place, in every experience. He will come surely in his glory and majesty to judge the whole human race. We are called upon to prepare ourselves for the future by loving and serving others at every possible occasion. Today's Gospel Reading is prophetic in nature and was applied to the days of Jesus. But it is also applicable to us in today's situation. It invites us to be prepared to receive the Lord worthily without any fear. We are still called to persevere in our living faith and look forward in hope.

One day, as usually, an orphan, a little girl, stood at the street corner begging for food, money or whatever she could get. Now, this girl was wearing very tattered clothes, was dirty and quite dishevelled. A well-to-do you man passed that corner without giving the girl a second look. But, when he returned to his expensive

home, his happy and comfortable family, and his well-laden dinner table, his thoughts returned to the young orphan. He became very angry with God for allowing such conditions to exist. He reproached God, saying, How can you let this happen Why don't you do something to help this girl Then he heard God in the depths of his being responding by saying I did. I created you.

A Church goer wrote a letter to the editor of a newspaper and complained that it made no sense to go to church every Sunday. "I've gone for 30 years now," he wrote, "and in that time I have heard something like 3,000 sermons. But for the life of me, I can't remember a single one of them. So, I think I'm wasting my time and the pastors are wasting theirs by giving sermons at all." This started a real controversy in the "Letters to the Editor" column, much to the delight of the editor. It went on for weeks until someone wrote this clincher: "I've been married for 30 years now... In that time my wife has cooked some 32,000 meals. But, for the life of me, I cannot recall the entire menu for a single one of those meals. But I do know this... They all nourished me and gave me the strength I needed to do my work. If my wife had not given me these meals, I would be physically dead today. Likewise, if I had not gone to church for nourishment, I would be spiritually dead today!"

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