

Thirty Third Sunday of the Year – November 15, 2015

Daniel 12:1-3; Hebrews 10:11-14, 18; Mark 13:24-32

Today is the second last Sunday of the Church liturgical year. Next Sunday we will celebrate the Feast of Christ the King. As the church brings its liturgical year to an end, it traditionally presents the knowledge of the end times. This gives us the message that Jesus is the beginning and end of all things, all things exist in and through him. He is the Alpha and the Omega and he is the source of all things. Today when we look round the world, we see so much of sufferings, hardships and pain. There is much corruption, terrorism and poverty. The world experiences the hardships of what is generally termed as the climate change. But here we have a message of hope in the words of Jesus. We visualize the Kingdom of God that offers love, compassion, kindness and mercy, the sign of new hope of the future. Even in the midst of suffering and hardship, the word of God continues to be alive and active. As we wait for the fulfillment of the kingdom of God in Christ and look forward to a just, loving and peaceful world. In the first reading of today we are presented with a holy person seeing the vision of God. He sees that God's faithful people will rise to eternal life. In the second reading we are reminded that Christ's sacrifice has accomplished the forgiveness of all sins. We have been consecrated to his Father and made perfect in God's sight. Today's gospel anticipates the dramatic events that will take place at the end times. It speaks of a time of suffering, the sun being darkened, the moon not giving its light, the stars falling from heaven, and the powers of heaven being shaken. It will be a time when heaven and earth will pass away forever.

The first reading taken from the Prophet Daniel tells us of the protective power of God over all creation and over all people. It tells us how God took care of his people all through the years of persecution and oppression by Persia, Greece and Syria. The last empire received a special attention since it is the one where the people were struggling when the book was written. The author of the book had a purpose of encouraging the Jews, asking them to remain faithful to their religion in spite of their bitter persecution and the attraction for many of them of higher pagan culture of Hellenism. The passage tells us that at that time Michael, the great prince, the protector of the people, shall arise. He serves God by shielding the people in time of distress. This shall be a time of anguish, such as has never occurred since nations first came into existence. But at that time the people shall be delivered from their struggle. Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth, namely the dead, shall be raised, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and

everlasting contempt. Michael will be the great prince and guardian of the people. God's holy people will rise to everlasting life and the wise among them will shine like stars against the dark of the night. God has dominion over all.

In the second reading the author to the Letter to the Hebrews continues to compare the priesthood of Christ with the Jewish priesthood. The Temple priests offered the same sacrifice of goats, sheep and oxen day after day. But those sacrifices could not remove the barriers that stood between God and man. Any graces resulting from these Jewish sacrifices were obtained in view of the real sacrifice that was to come. Jesus the High Priest offered the sacrifice once and for all for our sins, as a fulfillment of all the sacrifices. The sacrifice he offered was of infinite value because it is God's own son who is incarnate offering this sacrifice to God. The task of every priest is to offer sacrifice, standing day after day at the service of God and offering again and again the same sacrifice. The Old Testament sacrifices offered for the expiation sin were ineffectual. They reminded people of their sins and prepared them for purification, for the one perfect eternal sacrifice of Jesus. In the New Testament, Jesus offered one sacrifice for sin and this one sacrifice affected the forgiveness of all the sins. Henceforth there is no further need of any offering for sin. We need only to accept the gift of forgiveness. Christ has consecrated us to God his Father and has made us perfect in his sight.

As the church brings its liturgical year to an end, it traditionally draws upon that portion of the Gospel that deals with the end time. In the Gospel of Mark, the whole of chapter 13 deals with issues of the end of the world. This chapter is known as the apocalyptic discourse as it speaks in the apocalyptic language though it is not technically a discourse. The gospel speaking about the Son of Man "coming in clouds with great power and glory" echoes a passage in the Book of Daniel but here the Son of Man is even more victorious. Jesus speaks of the appearance of the Son of Man in glory and the final establishment of the Reign of God. The Son of Man here is understood as Jesus, the man on earth that the disciples knew and loved, but now appearing in all the unparalleled glory of God's own majesty. His appearance is described in terms usually used in the Old Testament for the appearances of God himself. He sends out his angels or messengers and gathers all God's people together: acts of God in the language of the Old Testament. Here they are gathered to the Son of Man, who commands the angels to perform the final act for him. Thus we have an affirmation of the central place Jesus, the Son of Man, and he will be the one to take care of all and gather all people to him. He will send out the Angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven. However the chapter

narrates the devastating events that should not be taken as signs of the end of the world, such as the destruction of the Temple, persecutions and the desolating sacrilege, but a preparation for the coming of the Lord.

The first half of today's Gospel leans heavily on traditional language and ideas from the Old Testament. We need to emphasize that the description of events is not to be understood literally as a prophecy of what is actually going to happen. Rather we are to look at the inner meaning of these happenings. The cosmic disturbances about the sun, moon and stars are traditional ways of describing manifestations of God's judgment of Israel. For Mark it is not the final end of time that will bring to resolution all the human problems and tensions that have been described in the Gospel. The signs of the final end will be so cosmic and unambiguous that the Christian community will know immediately that the time has arrived. The Son of Man will gather all God's people wherever they are into his kingdom. The focus is on the saving work of the Son of Man and he gives hope to people who are in a situation of suffering and pain. While all these things are being forecast, there is no time frame given. We are not told of the time of the final coming of Jesus as King and Lord of all. He in effect, was saying that although the end of the world is being described in calamitous terms, his disciples are to respond with faith, with hope, with anticipation. The end of the world means good times, summer, for them. They are not signs that God has lost control of history but that he is bringing things to a triumphant end. It is indeed the victory of God and the twilight of all the lesser gods which men have created for themselves over the centuries.

For Mark it is the final end of time that will bring to resolution all the human problems and tensions that have been described throughout the Gospel. The signs of this final end will be so cosmic and unambiguous that the Christian community will know immediately that the time has arrived. Mark depicts the final end as a grand cosmic short circuiting. The cosmic signs will be visible, such as the failing of light from the sun and the falling of the stars from the sky. The entire fold of heavenly powers will be shaken. The Son of Man will be vindicated and God's people wherever they are will be gathered once again. The focus here is the saving work of the son of man. There is no mention of resurrection and final judgment. The Son of Man here is understood as Jesus, the man on earth that the disciples knew and loved, but now appearing in all the unparalleled glory of God's own majesty. Thus we have an affirmation of the central place Jesus, as seen in the expectations of the Christians and present himself as a reflection of the divine role he is understood to exercise.

Mark does not directly answer the inquiry as to when precisely all this is going to take place. There is the assurance that the end times will come but Jesus clearly says that only the Father is aware of it. What he says is that when these things take place, the believers and the faithful will unmistakably know the signs that the time has come. Even so, the early Christians did expect that Jesus would come in their lifetime. This is reflected in the words, "This generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place." This was natural for those who grew up in the Jewish tradition; the end of Jerusalem could only mean the end of the world. Each generation of men and women expects Jesus to return to earth. He has made his promise. The first Christians awaited him with a firm hope as specified in the Acts of the Apostles. Many generations were disappointed because this promise of the return of the Lord has not yet been fulfilled. Yet the Lord comes to us. He comes daily in the Eucharist and will be with us at end times to unite all to himself.

Jesus then gave a short parable or lesson from the fig tree. Fig trees were a prominent and well-known feature on the Mount of Olives, the place where Jesus was speaking. This tree only sprouts its leaves in late spring. When the buds appear they know that summer is near. The obviousness of the time for the coming of the Son of Man will be just as recognizable and certain. So Jesus, in effect, is telling them that although the end of the world is being described with such terrible signs, his disciples were called upon to respond with faith, with hope, with anticipation. The end of the world means good times, summer, for them. It will come and will bring them joy and happiness like every summer providing good times. They are the signs that God is in full control of history but that he is bringing things to a triumphant end. It is indeed the victory of God and the twilight of all the lesser gods which men have created for themselves over the centuries. On the other hand we are told that the Son of man will arrive suddenly and without any warning. Either way it tells us that the signs are indeed clear and it is important that we are all ready for the same. All of us are called upon to be prepared.

No one, says Jesus, not even he himself knows when the end will come. It is not for us to worry about that. Worrying will not help. On other hand, we should not play with life and keep putting off the day of our conversion to God. The only way is to live today and every day in his love and service. It is the present which determines the future; so let's just concentrate on the here and now. Then we already have entered the Lord's Kingdom and when, early or late, he comes to call us to himself, it will just be a reunion of old friends. In fact, he is already here and has always been and always will be. It is not that he will come to us but that we will enter into a deeper relationship with him when we pass through death to a

different kind of life. The message for us today is that Jesus has made a sacrifice for us that we may be saved and enter into his kingdom. It is God who has decided from the beginning of times to love us as we are created in his own image and likeness. Indeed the love that Jesus showed us goes beyond all the expectations, taking us into the depth of the love of the Father.

Now, at the end of the year, let us revive our confidence in Jesus, our Lord and savior. Let us, we who believe in the Word of God, be confident that the Lord will do everything in order that we might appear before him and hear him say to us: "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master." We also will listen to his consoling words: "Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Today, in this Sunday's Gospel, Jesus does give us signs that he will come but at an unexpected time and we must be ready to welcome him. On his part he is ready to welcome us and accept us as his beloved children. The Lord is good and he gives us signs which will announce his return: it is up to us to be watchful. If we are not, if we do not await him, then surely he will condemn us for all eternity. Mary our mother awaits us and she watches over us, wishing with all her Love that all those to whom she gave birth in the faith will forever be with her in Heaven. Let us have confidence in Mary and ask her to take us by the hand to the Gates of eternity.

A friend asked Samuel Morse, the inventor of Telegraph, whether during all his experiments, he had come across a moment or stage where he did not know what to do next. Morse in reply said it had happened to him more than once. There were anxious moments in his life where he was unable to move. It looked as if all things had come to a dead end. Then how he overcame, asked his friend. Morse replied that in confidence he would tell him that in such moments he would just kneel down and pray to God to give him light and understanding. The friend asked him whether he got that light and understanding from God. Morse replied emphatically yes and he got it every time he asked. Therefore he added when he received honors from America and from Europe on account of his invention which bears his name he never even once felt he deserved them. He had made only a valid application of electricity not because he was superior to others but solely because God, who meant it for mankind, would have revealed it to someone and was pleased to reveal it to Morse.

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