

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time B/2006

For many of us, the happenings of Tsunami or the hurricane Katrina are still alive in our memories. The continual violence in Iraq and the permanent tension between Israel and Palestine, as well as many conflicts as distress throughout the world, like in Sudan, reminds us how fragile is our world and how we live at the edge of a possible implosion. What can our faith tell us when facing such dramatic situations and human tragedies? Are they warning signs that our world is coming to its end? Or can we discover in them a certain hope in the sense that no night is so long and dark that it has no dawn?

Today's readings invite us to reflect on such events by shedding light on world catastrophes and by showing the hope to which Christians are called. In the first reading, Daniel addresses the Jewish people who are in exile and persecuted for their faith, in order to encourage them to hope for God's liberation.

Using images from the apocalyptic literature, the prophet promises the destruction of the enemy powers and the restoration of God's righteousness. There will be a time of big distress where the angel of God will destroy the world dominated by wickedness, injustice and persecution.

However, God's faithful people will be preserved. Because of their fidelity, all those whose name is written in the book of life will survive. Even those who have died a long time ago will rise from the dust and live forever. And this is the first time in the Old Testament that the resurrection of the dead is mentioned.

Behind this text, there is a message of hope, namely that God cannot betray his love for us. In whatever appalling situation we find ourselves, God can intervene and set us free. The same is true about sin, as attested in the letter to the Hebrews: Not even the worst thing that can happen to people, and that is sin, can be the cause of discouragement, because Christ has overpowered it already.

If, however, we still experience sin, it is because all the enemies of good have not been placed under the feet of Christ and made his footstool. Therefore, we must eagerly and vigilantly wait for victory to be manifested in full when Christ will destroy every evil and reign forever over the whole world.

The text teaches also that no labor is in vain. No tears, no pain, no sacrifice accepted for the sake of our faith is lost. Our faithfulness will speed up the rise of a new world, and we will share in the joy of God's Kingdom. Therefore, the end of this life does not mean the end of all, but the beginning of new era with God.

It is the same message we find in today's Gospel as Jesus predicts his second coming at the end of time. First of all, with apocalyptic images, the Gospel describes the manifestations accompanying the return of Christ. There will be tribulations and fall of the stars and confusion over the entire world, says the Gospel.

However, these signs should not be taken literally, as many fundamentalists do. The reason is that the return of Christ, which we call "parousia", cannot be calculated according to human logic or the laws of nature. It is an event that

transcends human history and its laws and nobody knows the time and, the circumstances it will occur. These images intend only to say that Christ's second coming is an important event that will determine the fate of the whole universe. This is why it would be a mistake to use these images to force people to live in fear of God's judgment at the end of time. The fear that the end of the world is near has never convinced anybody to leave sin and follow the Christian way of life. True faith in God comes not out of fear, but of love.

Instead of spreading fear, Jesus' message is all about an announcement of joy. He comes to bring about salvation. He will send his angels to gather his elect from all over the world not to destroy them, but to save them.

As such, Jesus teaches us to spread hope and optimism around us. In fact, Christians are not blind to the difficulties and dramas that beset every person's life, and they do not consider them as signs of death but like the woman's labor pains, as announcing the birth of a new life. This is why, in a world dominated by so much hatred, violence, suffering and tears, we, as Christians, have to be the beacons of hope and the source of love, joy and peace.

Christian optimism is not a denial of conflict or the presence of sin in the world and in individuals. Evil and Conflicts exist, but they do not have the last word because Christ will triumph over them. Christian hope should push the Christians to look at what is positive in each situation as well as in the individuals, instead of focusing on the negative. It means also that inhabited by the Spirit of Christ, Christians should work to resolve conflicts and spread peace and joy around them. If we do not do so, we fail to follow the recommendation of Jesus.

If Christian hope and optimism are based on the assurance that Christ will triumph over every evil, when will it happen? For Jesus, only the Father, and nobody else, knows the time and hour of the final establishment of God's kingdom. In this respect, what is required is vigilance. We are invited to stay alert like the farmer who is able to recognize the signs that mark the coming of the new season.

In other words, Jesus is inviting all those who suffer because of their love for the truth, justice, peace and freedom not to be discouraged. Even in darkest moments, they will be able to see the signs of God's kingdom that is coming closer. Jesus is warning us also that we may not fall asleep and grow weary in our lives while he is delaying his return. To fulfill our duties every day, prepared to meet Christ is the best way to wait for him. Finally, Jesus is giving us an assurance that he will come back even if many do not take it seriously.

Let us pray God to help us prepare our hearts every day for the second coming of Christ. Let us ask him to give us courage and perseverance in suffering endured for the sake of our faith. May God bless you all!



Homily Date: November 19, 2006

© 2006 – Father Felicien Ilunga Mbala

Contact: www.mbala.org

Document Name: 20061119homily.pdf