

33rd Sunday in Ordinary time C/2007

When we look at our life, as well as at human history, we have the impression that there is nothing new under the sun. The unfolding of human history gives the impression that the world has always existed as it is now, and will exist in the future. A quick look at our genealogy can but reinforce such an impression when we realize that we are the children of our parents who, in turn, stem from our grand-parents, who, in turn also, come from our great grand-parents, etc.

The consequence of such a process is that, as we think that everything will always be like that, we run the risk of falling into lethargy and stop letting ourselves being questioned by the word of God about our stand in the world and our hope for the future to which we are called in Jesus Christ. That is the reason the readings of this Sunday want to warn us by reminding us that things will not always be as we see them and think of them.

In the first reading, the prophet Malachi reminds the Israelites that the day of the Lord is coming like a blazing fire in an oven to consume the proud and the evildoers. At the same time, that day will be brightening over the just and those who fear the Lord, because it will bring them the healing rays of the Lord.

In order to better understand the sense of this prophecy, we have to bear in mind that, after the return from exile and the settlement in their land, the people of Israel hoped for a change in their situation. But, things did not go well at all that way; exploitation of the poor and mediocrity took place instead of the blessings they were hoping. It is at that time that God sent Malachi to encourage them and promise them the destruction of the wicked and the rewarding of the faithful.

It is the same message of God's intervention in history we find in today's Gospel, but given from another context. In fact, as Jesus walked around the temple, he realized that people were fascinated and more preoccupied with the beauty of the temple and, thereby, with the grandeur of human achievement, than with their own stand before God.

In order to warn them, as he does for us today, Jesus tells them that all they are admiring is not eternal. "There will be a day where no a stone will be left upon another stone". When we think of the World Trade Center, in New York, the tallest building in the world, and worthy of human pride, we realize how human achievements can be fragile. It is not only a question of buildings, but also of empires and kingdoms, including our own body.

Of course, such a declaration from Jesus could but raise concerns from the disciples. When will this happen and what are the signs, they ask Jesus? In response, Jesus warns, first of all, against the cheating from those who will come and pretend to be acting in his name and deceiving people. In fact, the false prophets are a real danger to the Christian community today as it was in the past. Then, Jesus speaks of wars and insurrections, conflicts between nations and earthquakes, famines and plagues, as the other warning signs. But, he immediately adds that, even if these things happen, that will not mean necessarily that the end is there.

I think that by listening to such words, the fanatics of apocalypse, that is, those who like to exploit the images of natural disasters to predict the end of the world, and put people into fear, feel disappointed. They tried to do it with the Tsunami and the Hurricane Katrina by telling us that God was punishing the sinners with these events. But this is not what Jesus or the Scriptures say. Are you really better than any of those who died in Tsunami, or those who have lost everything in hurricane Katrina? Who can honestly answer “yes” to this question?

That is why at the question of knowing when these events will happen, Jesus just kept silence. That silence is heavy of consequence. It means that only God alone knows when the end of the world will happen. What we have to do meanwhile is to prepare ourselves every day so that any time it might happen; it finds us ready, alert and vigilant. This is the time of vigil in which we do not have the right to sleep just like that.

Even in the case of persecution and mistreatment from our adversaries because of the name of Jesus, there is hope. That is why, once again, Jesus warns us against the discouragement and too much worries we can have in hardships we endure for the sake of God’s kingdom.

For Jesus, in fact, we have to give testimony in adversity in order to show our attachment to him. We have to remember that he is with us and he will assure our defense. He will give us the wisdom of speech so that we may say the right words, at the right time, to which none of our adversaries will resist or refute. He will assure not only our juridical defense, but the defense of our physical integrity, as well. That is why Jesus comforts us that, in spite of rejection and hate, not a hair of our head will be destroyed. In times of despair and confusion, always remember who you are, someone who is with Jesus.

And yet, there is again a warning: “By your perseverance, you will secure your lives”. These words remind us that anxieties and fear are possible, but we have to hold out. We have to be faithful to our commitments in spite of possible sufferings we can have. That faithfulness and perseverance will save us.

For St Paul, we have to exercise our vigilance, faithfulness and perseverance by working in this world until the day the Lord will come back. St Paul himself is an example of a hard worker who never depended on people and who wants all the Christians to do the same. As Disciples of Christ, we can never use the waiting of God’s kingdom as an excuse for not being active in the world. Our responsibility for our salvation goes hand in hand with our commitment in society. The new world we are waiting for at the end of time has to be started now through our patient work to transform the conditions of the present world. May God bless you all!

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



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