

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time C/2010

The readings of this Sunday invite us to reflect on the concept of the coming of the day of the Lord. They try to show us what will happen at that time and how we have to conduct ourselves until the Lord Jesus returns.

First of all, we need to know that, for the Jews, time was divided into two ages, namely the present age in which the good and the bad exist, and the age to come which was seen as the golden age of God's supremacy over the whole world. In between, there would be the day of the Lord, which was seen as a terrible time and the birth-pangs of the new age.

When the prophet Malachi speaks of the blazing day, when all the evildoers and the proud will be destroyed, he is certainly referring to the coming of the day of the Lord. But that day will be, at the same time, a moment of liberation for those who have been fearful of the Lord and faithful to him.

Two main ideas are behind this prophecy, namely the conviction that whatever might be the prosperity of the wicked, time will come when all that will stop. Another is the hope that those who are faithful to God will one day be rewarded for their fidelity. In that sense, the purpose of the prophecy is a warning toward the wicked so that they convert and avoid God's punishment. At the same time the purpose is to help the just keep the momentum in fearing God and in doing good without ceasing.

The historical context of this prophecy provides us with a spiritual frame to understand today's Gospel. The starting point of Jesus' speech is consecutive to an observation made by some people about the beauty of the temple. For Jesus, in spite of all its beauty, the temple is not eternal; it will one day be destroyed like any other human endeavor.

In fact, Jesus' intention in making such a statement is to draw the attention of his disciples to the fragility of the human condition that is not only limited to the buildings people produce, but beyond them to human life and, most importantly, to history itself. In that perspective, the attention of Jesus is not only to the temple as such, but to those who enter that house and, from them, to history in general. Then, we can understand the reaction of the disciples who want to know when that destruction will take place and the signs that will accompany it.

Rather than answering them directly, Jesus warns them against the deception from those who will pretend to act in his name. He invites them to prudence and

serenity. Even if there would be wars and insurrections, famines and plagues, conflicts between nations and earthquakes, that would not be the end at all.

With this remark, Jesus reminds us of the truth he has always defended, namely that we do not know the time, the day, or the date of the end of the world. If that is the case, what matters most is not the end in itself, but our conversion of heart and our preparation to meet the Lord, so that any time he comes back he might find us alert and not sleepy.

It is for that very reason that Jesus kept silence at the question of knowing when these events will happen. That silence means that God alone knows when the end of the world will happen. For our part, what we have to do is to be vigilant. This is the time of vigil in which we do not have the right to sleep, but to stay awake in the Lord.

I presume that those who like to use the images of world disasters, like in the case of Tsunami or hurricane Katrina, as God's punishment over people or the announcing signs of the end of the world, feel really uncomfortable with what I am saying. The truth, however, is that a religion based on fear can never produce true conversion. True conversion comes only in freedom when one willingly turns from sin and gives his life to God. After all, none of us can say that he/she is better than the innocent who died in Tsunami or Hurricane Katrina.

Whatever might be our situation, like in the case of persecution or rejection from families, relatives or friends, one thing is sure: Jesus is our assurance and we will never miss the assistance and the consolation of his Holy Spirit. That is why he insists that in time of adversity we give testimony as our mark of attachment to him.

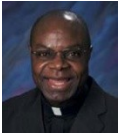
We have to remember that Jesus is with us and he will assure our defense. He will give us the right speech that none of our enemies can refute or destroy. He will take care of our physical integrity. That is why he claims that not a hair of our head will be destroyed. All that comes just to one truth: in time of conflicts, problems and adversities, we have always to remember that we are not fighting alone, but rather with Jesus who is at our side. For that reason, we have to persevere, because only perseverance will secure our lives.

It does not mean that we have to hate the world because of its rejection or persecution. On the contrary, we have to love it and work in it for its transformation until the day the Lord will come back.

That is the example St Paul gives us and which he recommends us to follow. He insists that we work hard in order to freely earn our life. He encourages us not to be dependent on people.

In fact, what St Paul wants is that we come to understand that we can never use the waiting of the return of the Lord as an excuse for not being active in the world. In this time of waiting, we have to transform the world by our work and to be accountable before God. The new world we are waiting for at the end of time is started today through our patient work to transform the conditions of the present world. We pray that the Lord helps us understand this truth and give us the grace to implement it in our lives. May God bless you all!

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



Homily Date: November 14, 2010

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Document Name: 20101114homily.pdf