

Thirty-Third Sunday in Ord. Time C/2013

The readings of this Sunday talk about the day of the return of the Lord. They show that it will be a day of great transformation, of fear and of confusion, where the whole earth and what it contains will be shaken in its foundation. While all this will be happening, those who believe in God will be secured and safe.

The first reading describes the day of the Lord in terms of a fire that will destroy the things of the earth and the people who inhabit it. At the same time, it shows that for those who are fearful of God, things will be different, because they will be liberated.

What is behind this text is the idea that the world as we know it will not always be as it is today; it will change. Another idea is the truth that whatever change might happen to the world, those who love God will be rewarded for their faithfulness.

This allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus talks about the day of the coming of the Lord. First of all, the Gospel starts with an observation made by some people who were admiring the temple and its decorations. In turn, Jesus reacted to their admiration by revealing that the temple will be destroyed and nothing of what they admire will remain.

Because of that revelation, they then asked him to know when all that would happen and which signs would accompany that destruction. Before giving them some signs, Jesus warned them about the deception from those who would pretend to come in his name and talk about the imminence of his coming.

With regard to the signs, Jesus talked about wars, insurrections, violence between nations, earthquakes, famines, plagues and mighty signs from the sky. However, that would not be an immediate end, he says.

Then, Jesus gave the signs related to the very identity of the disciples like persecutions, imprisonments, accusations before governments, familial hatred and death, etc. However, even in those cases, he asked them not only to give witness to him, but also not be worried about what they have to say because he will give them such wisdom in speaking that their adversaries will be powerless to resist or refute. Moreover, he assured them of their salvation, that not a hair of their head will be destroyed, and their perseverance will secure their lives, too.

What do we learn from this Gospel? I want today to talk about faith and the end of the world. In fact, when we read the Gospel and the signs Jesus gives, it is obvious that there is a strong affirmation that the world will one day come to an end.

The occurrence in our own life of historic events like 9/11, natural calamities like Tsunami, Hurricane Katrina and others, the recent typhoon in Philippines, have left us wondering if those are not the signs that the world is coming to an end.

Whatever might be the interpretation we give of these events, we have to open wide our eyes at the invitation of Jesus. We should not deceive ourselves beyond what Jesus says. That is why we have to listen to him carefully.

First of all, by responding to the admiration of the temple with the possibility of its destruction, Jesus draws our attention to the fragility of the human condition that is not only limited to the buildings people produce, but beyond them to human life, including

human history itself. In that perspective, the attention of Jesus is not directed only to the temple, but to those who enter that house and, from them, to history in general. In fact, human endeavor is fragile; life is fragile and history is fragile. They can be destroyed; they can come easily to an end, whatever might be their beauty. Even the beauty of a body can fade as I have learned by losing hair.

Then, we understand why his interlocutors wanted to know the time and the signs preceding such an event. Here comes the astonishing thing. Instead of answering directly, Jesus warned them not to be deceived by those who will pretend to act in his name. Even in the case of signs like wars, insurrections, famines, plagues, conflicts between nations and earthquakes..., Jesus reminds us that it would not be the end at all.

By saying so, Jesus confirms this fact that only his Father, in his plan, knows the day, the time and the date of the end. If that is true, then, what matters most for us is not to know the time of the end, but, rather our conversion of heart and our preparation to the coming of the Lord whatever might be the time of his return.

Those who like to use the images of world disasters and natural calamities as God's punishment and the precursor signs of the end of the world feel a little bit uncomfortable with my speech. 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 or in Philippines.

For us who believe, there is an assurance, namely that Jesus is with us. Even if we go through persecution and rejection from families and relatives, Jesus will not abandon us. He will assure our defense and security. That is why he insists that in time of adversity we give testimony as our mark of attachment to him. That is why also he wants us to persevere because only perseverance will secure our lives.

Does it mean that because the world hates us because of Jesus, we have to reject it? No; we have to love it and work in it for its transformation until the day the Lord will come back. That is what St Paul requires of us as he invites us to work hard in order to freely earn our life. In that sense, the waiting of the return of the Lord should not be an excuse for not being active in the world. We have to understand that the 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. Let us pray that the Lord may help us understand this truth and give us the grace to implement it in our lives. May God bless you all!

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



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