

Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time B/2015

The readings of this Sunday talk about the end of time. They show that the world, as we know it, will one day come to an end. They also invite us to prepare ourselves for the second coming of the Lord Jesus.

The first reading of the book of Daniel describes in a symbolic language the end of time. It shows that when it will come, Michael, the prince of God's Angels, will rise and set the world on judgment. It shows also that, though it will be a time of distress over all the earth, the people of God will escape. Finally, the text explains how the wise and the just will rise from the dead and shine like the stars, while the evildoers will suffer punishment.

What is behind this text is the idea of the affirmation of the fragility of the world. There is also the idea that our earth, as beautiful and loveable as it appears, is not eternal, because one day it will come to an end. The last idea is related to the affirmation of the reward that the just will receive and the punishment that the unrighteous will endure.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus talks about the end of time. First of all, the Gospel starts with Jesus addressing his disciples over the end of time. Then, it enters into details by showing what that day will be as a time of tribulation over the earth, while the moon, the stars and the powers of heavens will be shaken. Then, it speaks of the coming of the Son of Man who, through the action of his angels, will gather all his elects from all over the world.

In the last part of the Gospel, Jesus reassures his disciples about the veracity of his words which will not pass away. Finally, the Gospel ends with a reference to the secret of the Father about the time of the end.

What do we learn from this Gospel? Today I want to talk about the reality of the end of time. In order for you understand what I mean, let me, first, refer to human history. In fact, human history contains three important moments: the past, the present and the future. Those moments are crucial in the unfolding of history and the understanding of human life. In truth, any assessment of human life makes sense only in so far as it refers to these three moments.

The past, indeed, is about the things that are behind us and we cannot change. Perhaps from the past can we draw lessons for the present, but we cannot change it. What is past is past. The present is about the things which are under our control and we are dealing with right now. We can change our present in a good or a bad way depending on how we handle it. The future depends to a large extent on the present, even if it is true that we cannot control everything. That is why the future is unknown and mostly unpredictable. Nevertheless, it can be anticipated and even imagined how it will be by considering the factors and the trends we have in the present.

This evocation of the three moments of human history allows us to better understand the event of the coming of Jesus. As a matter of fact, the first coming of Jesus refers to his birth, passion, death and resurrection. It is this event of his first coming that has led us to faith in him. That faith is a continual trend that engages us today as followers of Jesus and makes us Christians.

It is like being the great-great children of our great-great parents who do not exist anymore, but whose past existence gives meaning to our life today. So is the first coming of Jesus. It gives meaning to our life and justifies our faith. Because of our faith in Jesus, our today becomes a moment that God gives us to prepare for his return.

The expectation of the return of Jesus, indeed, is very challenging, because the unfolding of human history gives us the impression that the world has always existed in the past, exists now and, very likely, will exist tomorrow. The best example we can give on this regard is about our family tree. For instance, we are the children of our parents, who, in turn, are children of their own parents who are our great-grand parents. Our great-grand parents are children of their own parents who are our great-great grandparents, and so on.

Such an observation gives us the impression of being engaged in a perpetual cycle of birth-death that characterizes our genealogy, from our parents to our great-great-grandparents and vice versa. Even when, young people get married, they still keep the hope of continuing the cycle of parents-children-grandparents-great grandparents. In the end, it gives the impression that the world is eternal, that as it was in the past, so will it be in the future.

The truth, however, and that is the point of today's Gospel, is that the world will one day come to an end. That is why Jesus says that heaven and earth will pass away, but not his words. But, do we know when and how all that will happen? No. Though some people are used to terrifying us about the end of time when they see some signs the Bible talks about, we have to remain prudent, serene and respectful of God's secret. Why? Because, we are not dealing with a material event that can be predicted according to the laws of the physics of the universe, but rather a spiritual event that transcends human history and its laws. It is for that specific reason that Jesus says that nobody knows the time and the hour the world will come to an end, except his Father.

If that is true, then, what is required of us is to be vigilant in the awaiting of that moment. It is not a question of living in fear, but of using our present life as a time of preparation for the second coming of Jesus. Moreover, we have to understand that our future depends on how we live now in fidelity to Jesus and his word. That is the grace we have to ask of the Lord, namely to be faithful and prepared every single day so that we might not be surprised by the event of the coming of the Lord. May God bless you all!

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



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