

Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time C/2016

The readings of this Sunday talk about the return of the Lord. They show that it will be a day of transformation, fear and confusion. They invite us to trust in God because that day will be a day of triumph for those who believe.

The first reading announces the prophecy of Malachi about the day of the coming of the Lord. It shows that that day of the coming of the Lord will be a time of judgment for the evildoers. It also shows that that day will be a moment of liberation for those who would remain faithful to the Lord.

What is behind this text is the idea that the world is not eternal. There is also the idea that the coming of the Lord will be a day of judgment for the just and the unjust alike. The last idea is related to the truth that whatever might happen to the world, those who love God will be rewarded for their faithfulness.

This text 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. Then, it gives the reaction of Jesus predicting the destruction of the temple and his warning to his followers that they stay vigilant and not be deceived.

After that, the Gospel talks about a second warning of Jesus about the premonitory signs of the coming of the Lord, but which, in fact, will not be determining of the end. The Gospel ends with Jesus' invitation to perseverance and the assurance that he will protect his beloved ones.

What do we learn from today's Gospel? Today I want to talk about the end of the world. In fact, when we look at our family tree, it is easy to track it back to five or six generations and even more. Such an observation gives us the impression that, as the world has existed in the past, it will exist in the future as it exists today.

However, when we listen to today's Gospel, it seems that the world will one day come to an end. It is for that reason that some encouraged by the speech of Jesus have interpreted the events like September 11, the Tsunami in the Indian Ocean on December 26, 2004, or very recently the Hurricane Katrina, as evident signs precursors of the end of the world.

But is that true? Well; whatever might be the interpretation we give of these events, we have to listen carefully to Jesus and not deceive ourselves. First, by reacting to the admiration of the temple in predicting its destruction, Jesus wants to draw our attention to the fragility of human endeavor.

In truth, it is not only the buildings that people construct which are fragile, but human life itself. In that perspective, the attention of Jesus is not focused only on the temple as a building, but on those who enter it and, from them, on history in general.

In fact, human endeavor is fragile as well as human life and human history. They can be destroyed; they can come to an end, whatever might be their beauty.

Even the beauty of a body can fade as I learned it by the appearance of wrinkles and losing hair.

Second, by inviting to prudence and vigilance those who asked him the question of when the end will come and by which sign it will be recognized, Jesus wants to draw our attention to the unknowingness of the time of the end. That is why even in the case of signs like wars, insurrections, famines, plagues, conflicts between nations and earthquakes, persecutions, Jesus reminds us that it would not be the end at all.

By saying so, Jesus confirms the 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 is important for us is not to know the time of the end, but, rather to be prepared so that whenever the Lord comes back, he finds us ready and awaiting him. This time of ours is a time of vigil in which we do not have the right to sleep, but to stay awake until the Lord comes back.

That is why those who like to use the images of world disasters and natural calamities as God's punishment or the precursor signs of the end of the world should be careful. In fact, any religion based on fear can never produce true conversion. True conversion, on the contrary, comes in freedom and when someone willingly turns his life to God and abandons sins.

Lastly, for us who believe, 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. Even if we go through persecution and rejection from families and relatives, Jesus will not abandon us. He will take care of our physical integrity. That is why he claims that not a hair of our head will be destroyed. As he takes care of us, he insists that in time of adversity we give testimony as our mark of attachment to him. That is why he also wants us to persevere because only perseverance will secure our lives.

Does it mean that as the world hates us because of Jesus, we have to reject it? No; we have to love it and work for its transformation until the day the Lord will come back.

In this time of vigil, let us ask the Lord to help us understand that the new world to come at the end of time is started today through our patient work of the transformation of the conditions of the present world. May he give us the grace of perseverance and the virtue of prudence in this awaiting! May God bless you all!

Malachi 3: 19-20a; 2 Thessalonians 3: 7-12; Luke 21: 5-28



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