

Thirty Third Sunday in Ordinary Time B2021

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

The book of Daniel describes a vision he had about 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 that the world is fragile and perishable. There is also the idea that our earth, as it appears, is not eternal; 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 the point of today's Gospel as Jesus talks about the end of time. The Gospel starts with Jesus addressing his disciples over the end of time. Then, it shows how that day will be a time of tribulation over the earth as the moon, the stars and the powers of heavens will be shaken. Then, it speaks of the coming of the Son of Man who will gather all his elect from all over the world.

The Gospel ends up with Jesus reassuring his disciples about the veracity of his words which will not pass away and 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 end of time. when we deal with the concept of the end of time, one category we have to grasp well is history. In itself, history has three important moments: the past, the present and the future.

The past is about the events that have already occurred. They are behind us and we cannot change them. They might influence us now, and perhaps determine our ways of being, but they are gone. The present is about the events that are happening right now. They are under making and under our control as we are dealing with them right now. We can change our present in a good or a bad way depending on how we handle it. The future depends on the present, even if we cannot control everything. For that reason, the future is unknown and unpredictable. Nevertheless, it can be anticipated and even imagined when considering the factors and the trends we have in the present.

This evocation of the three moments of human history has a parallel to the event of the coming of Jesus. The coming of Jesus, in fact is, threefold. There is the first coming of Jesus in the flesh, which refers to his birth, passion, death and resurrection. That event of his first coming has led us to faith in him. That faith is a continual trend that engages us today as his disciples and makes us Christians.

The first coming of Jesus 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. That return of Jesus is what we call the second coming.

But, there is also another coming of Jesus, that is, Jesus as he comes to us on a daily basis in our lives. Jesus, in fact, is with us every day until the end of time. He lives in

union with the Father and the Holy Spirit in our hearts. He dwells in our Church in the Holy Eucharist. He teaches us in the Holy Scriptures. He unites us with him and with one other in the community of faith, which is the Church.

We will be able to welcome Jesus at his second coming as long as we are faithful to him in our words and practices. 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 to give about that is 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-grandparents. 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-greatgreat grandparents and vice versa. Even those getting married hope to continue the cycle of parents-children-grandparents-great grandparents. In the end, it gives us the impression that the world is eternal, that as it was in the past, so will it be in the future.

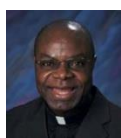
The truth, however, is that the world will one day come to an end. But, we have to clarify the concept of time in order to better understand what Jesus says. When we talk about the end of the world on the basis of the understanding of time that we have today, we immediately think of the absolute end of the world, after which there can be nothing but eternity. However, the Bible uses relative and historical categories more than absolute and metaphysical ones.

Thus, when the Bible speaks of the end of the world, it intends quite often the concrete world, that which in fact exists for and is known by a certain group of people, their world. It is, in sum, the end of a world that is being treated not the end of the world, even if the two perspectives at times intertwine.

Jesus says: "This generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place." Is he mistaken? No, it was the world that was known to his listeners that passed away, the Jewish world. It tragically passed away with the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. When, in 410, the Vandals sacked Rome, many people of that time thought that it was the end of the world. They were not all that wrong; one world did end, the one created by Rome with its empire. In this sense, those who, seeing the destruction of the twin towers on September 11, 2001, thought of the end of the world, were not mistaken

None of this diminishes the seriousness of the Christian charge but only deepens it. It would be the greatest foolishness to console oneself by saying that no one knows when the end of the world will be and forgetting that, for any of us, it could be this very night. For this reason Jesus concludes today's Gospel with the secret of the Father. Be vigilant and pray! Do not sleep in mediocracy! May God bless you all!

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



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