

## THIRTY THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME B2024

Next Sunday will be the last Sunday of the Church's year. When we come to this time, of the year, the readings of the Mass remind us of the fragility of our world and the reality of the world to come. They invite us to look at the goal of our life and to ask "What is my life all about? "Where am I heading"?" "How am I preparing myself for the world to come"?"

Those questions are raised against the background of a perceived belief that the world exists today as it has existed yesterday and will likely exist tomorrow. This perceived belief is based on empirical experience that history is a cycle of events. For instance, we are the children of our parents, who, in turn, are children of their own parents who are our grandparents. Our grandparents are children of their own parents who are our 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 family tree, from our parents to our grandparents and great grandparents. Even when people get married, they all keep the hope of becoming parents, great parents and, possible, great grandparents. All that 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, is that the world will one day come to an end. How do we know that? We have today two witnesses from the Scripture. The first witness is the prophet Daniel. Around 165 years before Jesus, Daniel received a revelation in which he was shown the events of the end of time. St Michael the archangel, who stands against all evil and the power of Satan, will appear. That time will be a time of great distress when the angel of God will destroy the world dominated by evil.

However, those who are faithful to God and whose name is written in the book of life will be preserved. Even those who died a long time ago will rise from the dust and live forever. That time will be also a time of retribution of the just who will shine in the presence of God like the stars, while the evil ones will undergo everlasting horror and disgrace.

What Daniel saw at distance in a dream was confirmed by our Lord Jesus. With apocalyptic images our Lord describes the manifestations that will accompany his return and sanction the end of the world. There will be tribulation and shaking in the sky and on earth. There will be confusion all over the world when the sun will be darkened, the stars will fall down and the moon will not give its light.

These signs, however, should not be taken literally for the simple reason that Christ's return cannot be predicted according to human laws as we do with the physics of the universe. It is first of all a spiritual event that will transcend human history and its laws. Nobody knows the time or the hour of its occurrence. Clearly we see that there are some things whose knowledge our Lord has left into the hands of his Father alone.

For that reason, those who are preoccupied with working on dates and timetables about our Lord's second coming are wrong. It is also true that our Lord will come back as he has promised, because even if heaven and earth can pass away, his words will not pass away. However, it would be a mistake to use the apocalyptic images describing his return to force people to live in fear of God's judgment at the end of time. The fear that the end of the world is near has never convinced anybody to abandon sin and follow the Christian way of life. True faith in God does not come out of fear, but of love.

What these apocalyptic images intend to tell us is only that the return of Christ will be an important event that will determine the fate of the whole universe. Moreover, 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. But the Bible goes about its reasoning with relative and historical categories more than with absolute ones.

Thus, when the Bible speaks of the end of the world, it means often the concrete world, that which exists for a certain group of people; that is their world. It is, in fact, the end of a world that is being treated, but not the end of the world in general. For sure, our Lord 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 hearers 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 great figures of the 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. When on September 11, 2001 there was the destruction of the twin towers, those who spoke of the end of the world, were not wrong at all. A world stopped that day, but not the world.

These remarks open our eyes to another dimension of the return of Christ, namely his daily coming to us in the ordinary circumstances of life. We must learn to recognize our Lord as he comes to us in the hungry, the poor, and the needy. Let us not forget that when people love each other, when they tell each other the truth and not lie, when they strive to work in unity and in respect of each other, our Lord is present in their midst. When we step forward for the right deed and action for the good of our fellows, our Lord is present. We have to take a lesson from a fig tree. When its leaves change, that is a sign of new season that is about to come.

Our Lord invites us to vigilance and readiness. He will come back even if many do not take it seriously. We have to be in a state of readiness and preparedness to meet the Lord with a clear conscience. Let us pray God to help us prepare our hearts every day for the second coming of Christ. Let us ask him to give us courage and perseverance in suffering endured for the sake of our faith.

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



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