

Cycle C 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading 1 MAL 3:19-20A

Lo, the day is coming, blazing like an oven, when all the proud and all evildoers will be stubble, and the day that is coming will set them on fire, leaving them neither root nor branch, says the LORD of hosts. But for you who fear my name, there will arise the sun of justice with its healing rays.

Responsorial Psalm PS 98:5-6, 7-8, 9

R. (cf. 9) The Lord comes to rule the earth with justice.

Sing praise to the LORD with the harp, with the harp and melodious song. With trumpets and the sound of the horn sing joyfully before the King, the LORD.

R. The Lord comes to rule the earth with justice.

Let the sea and what fills it resound, the world and those who dwell in it; let the rivers clap their hands, the mountains shout with them for joy.

R. The Lord comes to rule the earth with justice.

Before the LORD, for he comes, for he comes to rule the earth, He will rule the world with justice and the peoples with equity.

R. The Lord comes to rule the earth with justice.

Reading 2 2 THES 3:7-12

Brothers and sisters: You know how one must imitate us. For we did not act in a disorderly way among you, nor did we eat food received free from anyone. On the contrary, in toil and drudgery, night and day we worked, so as not to burden any of you. Not that we do not have the right. Rather, we wanted to present ourselves as a model for you, so that you might imitate us. In fact, when we were with you, we instructed you that if anyone was unwilling to work, neither should that one eat. We hear that some are conducting themselves among you in a disorderly way, by not keeping busy but minding the business of others. Such people we instruct and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to work quietly and to eat their own food.

Gospel LK 21:5-19

While some people were speaking about how the temple was adorned with costly stones and votive offerings, Jesus said, "All that you see here-- the days will come when there will not be left a stone upon another stone that will not be thrown down." Then they asked him, "Teacher, when will this happen? And what sign will there be when all these things are about to happen?" He answered, "See that you not be deceived, for many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he,' and 'The time has come.' Do not follow them! When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified; for such things must happen first, but it will not immediately be the end." Then he said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be powerful earthquakes, famines, and plagues from place to place; and awesome sights and mighty signs will come from the sky. "Before all this happens, however, they will seize and persecute you, they will hand you over to the synagogues and to prisons, and they will have you led before kings and governors because of my name. It will lead to your giving testimony. Remember, you are not to prepare your defense beforehand, for I myself shall give you a wisdom in speaking that all your adversaries will be powerless to resist or refute. You will even be handed over by parents, brothers, relatives, and friends, and they will put some of you to death. You will be hated by all because of my name, but not a hair on your head will be destroyed. By your perseverance you will secure your lives."

When we hear today's Scriptures we can tell we're coming to the end of the church year and that Advent is near. They tell us what we need to understand about the end times," "The Day of the Lord." So, it's time to dig into these Scriptures; it's time to peel back the layers and learn what is not to be feared...the end times will be a joyous time when the whole world will come to understand that God created mankind not for sin and death, but for eternal life.

In today's Gospel, Jesus is in the great temple and in just a few days He will be arrested and put to death. He's in this beautiful temple that was recently expanded and improved. And everybody comes in awe of the temple, how beautiful it is, this monument to the presence of God. And everybody admired, of course, *the costly stones and votive offerings*... Finally, Jesus had enough of it and says, "*All that you see here...the days will come when there will not be left a stone upon another stone that will not be thrown down.*"

No doubt the Jewish people thought Jesus was speaking of the horrendous end times when the ultimate desolation would happen. They feared the end times but also believed that out of that desolation would come something special, for The Messiah, The Christ would come and rescue them all. And so it was...they managed to have hope.

When the people asked Jesus, "*When is this going to happen? What sign will there be?*" He responded in a surprising way: "*See that you not be deceived, for many will come in my name.... do not be terrified; for such things must happen first...nation will rise against nation, kingdom against kingdom, earthquakes, famines, plagues; and awesome sights and mighty signs coming from the sky...you will be hated and some even killed.*" We know that in history, and in fact in our own lifetimes, we know that all of these things have actually happened around the world. So what was He saying? First of all, Jesus was saying: "*Yes, the world will do what the world does. There will be destruction...people crying for peace, but there is no peace....people suffering, but there is no healing...The selfishness and arrogance of man will continue to mock and laugh at the ways of those of us who follow God, who believe, who hope and who love.*"

But then Jesus adds something, and this is the main point, the Good News: *"It will lead to your giving testimony...Remember, you are not to prepare your defense beforehand, for I myself shall give you a wisdom in speaking that all your adversaries will be powerless to resist or refute."* He promises them, and us, with these words: *"...not a hair on your heads will be destroyed. By your perseverance you will secure your lives."* But how, we ask? It's because our faith and trust is in God...not in men. When we give our testimony, when we act in concert with the mission of Jesus Christ, we will find ourselves in places of persecution and wisdom and courage. We will never turn away from innocent people suffering. We will be transformed by Christ into the courageous people who give our testimony as we stand up for justice when enough is enough. And others will have hope because of our actions born in the promises of Jesus. And the whole world will come to understand that God created mankind not for sin and death, but for eternal life. Richard Rohr recently said it this way, *"We cannot think our way into being transformed. We must live ourselves into it....often weeping our way through it."*

For the ancient Jews, the Roman armies made Jesus' prophecy come true in 70 AD. The army came down with great anger to stop a rebellion and ended up ravaging the whole of Israel. They smashed into Jerusalem and starved the people and crushed the temple into dust. Over a million people died in that terrible outrage. Only one temple foundation wall was left standing which people still go to see today, it's called the Western Wall. Then the Jews were scattered all over the world. They were not allowed to return to their sacred city of Jerusalem. And it seemed it was the end times...But we of faith know that the end with God is never the end...with God the end is always new beginning. And so it was...those scattered Jews began to shake off the dust of defeat...and they rebuilt their faith and trust in Yahweh, and their hope for the future as God's Chosen People of the Old Covenant.

The early Christians were also persecuted during that terrible time and for hundreds of years after. They too were living the dreadful prophecy of Jesus, but they expected that He would soon return to judge the living and the dead. As they suffered, they began to be transformed to better understand what Jesus meant when He spoke of a New Covenant.

That new beginning gave them, and us, a mission to reach out with God's gifts of faith and hope to all people...with gifts of love and mercy, God's unconditional love was shared with all people. And that mission of *perseverance* never stopped reaching out to the ends of the earth for the last 2000 years. It's why we live transformed lives of faith and trust today in the love of Jesus Christ.

Today's readings are a lesson in history, and the lesson is this...as Yogi Berra, the great Yankee baseball player once said, "*It ain't over till it's over.*" It's not over until God ends it. And when He does, it will be a time of great joy and triumph as all mankind and the world will see, though the justice and mercy and love of Jesus Christ, that God's creation will enter a new way of life...sin and death will be gone, and all life will be eternal in His love.

So, at times of stress and strain, at times when we feel that things are collapsing all around us, whether it is in our nation, or in other nations, facing terrible tragedies...right now...whether it is groups of people who are being relentlessly persecuted...whether it is our own loved ones sick or dying...whenever we face this feeling that it's over and all is being destroyed, and there's no going back and there's no going forward. Whenever we feel that we are tired, weary even of doing good, that is the time to persevere!...that is the time to remember and trust Jesus... He never said "*Life would be easy,*" He said "*I will be with you always!*" He never said, "*Worship me,*" He said "*Follow me.*" We are the proof that He transforms sinners into saints!

Jesus understands what we are going through because He was human like us. He too suffered and died, but His New Covenant was born in His Resurrection. It seemed it was the end. But the end with God is never the end; with God the end is always a new beginning.

It ain't over till God says it's over...until then, we persevere in the love of Jesus Christ!

And, the Church says AMEN!