

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time
November 13, 2022

Malachi 3:19-20a
Psalm 98:5-6, 7-8, 9
2 Thessalonians 3:7-12
Luke 21:5-19

Considering recent events and in particular - the political drama with all its childish antics from both sides of the aisle - our nation continues to find itself deeply divided. It wouldn't be too far fetched to say that one half of our country wakes up on any given morning feeling glad, and the other half awakens feeling sad and/or even mad – and the happy or sad positions seem to change daily.

So, once again we find ourselves in a quandary - no matter which side we may resonate with, someone we know is going to be unhappy. So what are we to do?

Well first of all, our Lord calls us to be peacemakers. Hence humble peacemakers we should try to be.

Interestingly the first reading this morning from the Book of Malachi records the Lord God's sentiments towards those who succumb to pride and do evil. Only He is righteous in judgment and consequence. Subsequently, I think it behooves you and me, to be mindful that philosophical and political tension does exist.

The last thing we would want is for someone to feel uncomfortable or unwelcomed, especially when they come to church. Needless to say, let's be diligent to continue to pray for

our country's leaders - past, present, and future so that they and us will be willing to be guided by good will towards all men.

So onward we go, and here we need to mention the fast-approaching season of Advent, which begins on Sunday November 27th. Hence as we draw near to the end of another liturgical year and the starting of the next - the current Lectionary Gospel reading for today invites us to focus in on the destruction of the Jewish temple in AD 70, the Last Days, and the Second Coming of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

I believe its normal to want to know what is going to happen in the future. Yet we all know people who are *really* preoccupied in knowing what is going to happen, especially when it involves the end of the world. Feeding that inquisitive need to know, there are those who relish the notion that they can predict God's future events even to the exact date Jesus will return to judge the earth.

Bombarded with a plentitude of theories and theologies concerning the "Last Days" believers are often left in the dark as to what is true. Hence with all the "end times" speculation, wisdom suggests that we once again be mindful of, "That which has been believed everywhere, always, and by all" as per the canon of St. Vincent of Lerins, c. 434).

Bottom line, the future continues to remain obscure as if it were viewed through a dark glass. However this we do know, Jesus promised that He will return for His Bride; however, watch and be ready because we simply do not know when the Lord will return.

That being said, the Jewish people living during the time period of the prophet Malachi (450 b.c.) were also known for having a preoccupation with future events. They adamantly believed that when the Messiah appeared He would immediately establish a political kingdom wherein they would be vindicated and thus rule and reign forever over the earth as God's favored people.

Naturally this type of thinking began to be carried over into early Christian thought, and with different degrees of intensity it was generally believed by the Apostles that Jesus would return once again to earth within their lifetime, and thus *they* and not the Jewish leaders or the Romans would be the ones who would rule and reign with Him.

A good example of this thought is contained in the Gospel of Matthew and the story of Mary the mother of James and John, two of Jesus' disciples. Mary wanting the best for her boys came to Jesus to ask for a special favor for her sons in the coming Kingdom; but instead, they were all rebuked for having concerned themselves with who was going to sit on His right hand and sit on His left (see Matthew 20:20-22).

So if we were to go back in time we would soon discover that the Jews of every age were somewhat mistaken in their end-times beliefs and theology. What Israel failed to realize was that they too would be required to face the holy justice of God. The consequences for their disobedience and pride would eventually be reckoned with, and rather harshly at that.

Indeed, this was a difficult concept for them to understand because in the Jewish mindset, were they not the chosen people? Their argument was why would they face immediate judgment? For indeed the prophets, including Malachi had instructed that the Day of the Lord would be a day that God would right the scales of justice, punish evil and reward good. Unfortunately, little did they realize that some 35 years later they were to be judged according to their works in the form of the Temple being utterly destroyed and the City of Jerusalem ransacked and torn down.

Today, a similar type of theological dilemma puzzles many in the Christian world especially those holding to a theology of millennialism. Would God truly hold members of His Church accountable for their actions? They would say no - hoping that "the saved" would be raptured or removed from the fray; but, that way of thinking has never been the predominant theology of the historical Church.

God will hold every person, including His followers accountable for his or her actions and attitudes. Indeed the laws of sowing and reaping cannot be ignored; a person will reap in proportion as to what he/she sows.

Hence today's first OT reading though short, describes the final Day of the Lord and the end of the world wherein all empty works will be burned like the chaff after the harvest is removed. Good for little other than kindling, self-righteous works will not survive the test of godliness and repentance. In fact, nothing will survive apart from that which was initiated by God Himself. All self-

centered works of men and women will be destroyed. On the other hand those who labor in the will of God will rise triumphant - contrary to the flaming destruction in store for the wicked.

So here we must note a universal truth, in order for something new to come forth, something old must be done away with to make room for the new. New wine cannot be put into old wineskins. In order to have a new born-again-redeemed-life-in Christ, the old self-life must be put to death.

Certainly this was part of the message Jesus gave to those in the Gospel who were admiring the beauty of the richly adorned Temple in Jerusalem. To them and speaking about the impending judgment to come in a few short years He 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."

Here we might suggest that Jesus knew that the old temple and the animal sacrifices must be done away with before the new temple, which is the Church could come to fruition in and through the Eucharistic sacrifice.

Having left the Temple sight to walk across the Kidron Valley, the disciples still thinking like every other Jewish person that the Temple would last forever, and that Jesus was most likely speaking about the end of the world proceeded to ask the Master, when – and how – and what sign would predict this momentous occasion? Jesus promptly told them of the inevitable persecution they would have to face; yet they were to not worry or even take note of what to say,

For I myself shall give you wisdom in speaking that all your adversaries will be powerless to resist or refute. Indeed your family will hate and betray you, some of you will be put to death because of me, but not a hair on your head will be destroyed.”

In other words trust only in me, and you will live forever unscathed in the Kingdom. Jesus then proceeded to tell them of the many woes yet to happen but even though terrible events will happen - and happen they did - it will not yet be the end.

He then went on to say that the disciples themselves and all who would respond to the Gospel would suffer greatly for their faith in Him. Delivered into the hands of the enemies of the cross by friends, neighbors and even parents and children all who follow the name of the Risen Christ will suffer persecution; nevertheless, Jesus said, (and it's important to note) “By your perseverance you will secure your lives in the age to come.”

The word perseverance here means “steady persistence in a course of action in spite of difficulties, obstacles, or discouragement. In theological terms, perseverance is understood as continuance in a state of grace to the end, leading to eternal salvation. Hence the reason the Lord's disciple must be vigilant to keep His commandments.

So then what nuggets of truth are we to secure and observe from these passages? First, we need to realize that in this Gospel passage Jesus is talking primarily about the early disciples and

their Jewish converts to Christianity, the destruction of the Temple, and the destruction of Jerusalem in and around AD 70.

Even during the Abomination of Desolation, when at the hand of the Romans the Temple was being desecrated with swine's blood, they were not to be deceived because the final end was not yet at hand.

Here and even though The Lamb of God had been sacrificed and raised from the dead, and Temple sacrifice was finished; even so, they still had much work yet to do.

In closing this particular discourse with the disciples - Jesus did talk to them about the signs that would happen before the final end of the world. For example He said the sun and moon would fail to give light and the stars would fall from the heavens. For even more information we would have to read further into the Gospel of Luke than what we have time for today.

All that being said, in the end we will all be called upon to reckon concerning how we have lived our lives. As mentioned earlier, the Day of the Lord has always been believed to be the time when God would come in majesty and power to set all things right. The good will be rewarded and the evil punished. Exactly when He will come again in the clouds is yet to be revealed.

The notion that just because I choose to claim the gift of eternal life I have the right to do whatever I want does not make sense in light of a classical historical Christianity that exemplifies perseverance to the very end.

On the contrary to that notion, St. Paul reiterated the necessity of maintaining godly behavior when he wrote to the church gathered in Thessalonica,

“Brothers and sisters: You know how one must imitate us. For we did not act in a disorderly way among you. . . we wanted to present ourselves as a model for you that you might imitate us.”

Because we know that in the final judgment there will be an account given regarding our behavior, let us make every effort to live our lives so as to be pleasing to the Lord.

Thankfully, the coming Advent season will bring us once again *Back to the Future* to a place of repentance where we will be given another opportunity to change our personal history as we prepare to celebrate in the Incarnation of the Only Begotten Son of God.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.