

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time: If I Choose Jesus Always, then I am Prepared

Daniel 12:1-3; Psalm 16:5,9-10,11; Hebrew 10:11-14,18; Mark 13:24-32

When is the end of time? Or is it necessary to know it? These are questions many have attempted to answer. But we listen to the wisdom of the Gospel that no one knows the end of time except the Heavenly Father (cf Mk 13:32).

Our Gospel provides us with imagery of the end of time. At first hearing, we would probably react to the scary scenario that we heard. We are told that "In those days after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from the sky, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken" (Mk 13:24-25). These prophetic words of our Lord Jesus often cause negative speculations and restlessness, especially when we hear news of wars, ethnic cleansing, man-made and natural disasters, strange climate patterns, unrests in different parts of the world, and what have you. Sometimes people see them as the signs of the end of the world. Yes, there is always the end of anything that moves and breathes. But the readings this Sunday lead us to ponder our faith in Jesus, our spiritual disposition, and readiness.

Notice, the first two readings propose answers for us to consider. Prophet Daniel talked about the uncertainties and trials of life (cf Dn 12:1-5). Reflectively, amid tensions and difficulties, we are to stand firm and be responsible. With St. Michael, the Archangel, we have to do good, choose well, and choose God so that when our lives come to an end, we can join those who are righteous before the eyes of God.

The second reading tells us something similar. That Jesus has already achieved for us our salvation; that it is certain; to share in his glory is our future (cf Heb 10:12-14). It is what he is offering. But will we accept it, and will we work towards our sanctification? Will we always choose Jesus? It is a decision we make now and then.

Going back to our Gospel, our Lord Jesus stirred the mind of his listeners by mentioning the coming catastrophes, that is, the forces of nature, the sun, moon, and stars will no longer function. It is a massive and terrible disaster. Remember, in the Book of Genesis, God created the sun, moon, and stars to give light, but they will fall out of the sky. What we have here is an image of creation, an old order that comes to its end. But there is something new being offered, that we will see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. So, the new creation is the fulfillment of God's promise of salvation won by Jesus through his passion, death, and resurrection.

The imagery used in the Gospel is something hopeful, telling us: don't worry the world as you know it: the world of sin, greed, hatred, division, and injustice will fail one day. It will fail. The new world is coming when Jesus returns in power and glory. He will gather his people when he comes back, and those who have followed him will have everlasting life. He tells us: "Heaven and Earth will pass away, but my word will not pass away" (Mk 13:31). His coming is something sure, but he is asking us to be discerning of his coming. He gives us the parable of the Fig tree. When its leaves turn green and filled with sap, it is already a signal that summer is just around the bend that his listeners are familiar with and they can notice.

Similarly, when we see the configuration of the stars and sky, and it's cloudy, we say it will rain. We can notice. Discernably, he's implying to use this practical wisdom to detect and discern his presence. It is a constant invitation if we are to welcome him. We have the mission of detecting his presence, welcoming him through the poor and those in need, and working with him to construct a new world.

Furthermore, the early Church prayed for the Lord to come when they saw the trials of this world, the corruption, the violence, hatred running the world; their prayer was "Maranatha" or "Come, Lord, Jesus

come." The coming of the Lord is not something to be feared. It is something to be expected, to be longed for, with prayer and anticipation.

Jesus will come to us, but will Jesus find us coming to Him?

One of the petitions of the Lord's Prayer speaks about the necessity of spiritual vigilance -"lead us not into temptation." At our first hearing on this petition, we ask God not to allow us to take the path that leads to sin. But if we broaden our understanding, this prayer "lead us not into temptation," we are imploring the Spirit of discernment, and we are begging for the grace of vigilance and final perseverance. Indeed, we pray in the Mass, "Deliver us, Lord, we pray, from every evil, graciously grant peace in our days, that, by the help of your mercy, we may always be free from sin and safe from all distress, as we await the blessed hope and the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ."

We unite ourselves, or better still, our Lord Jesus unites us to his battle and his agony. We remember what he said to his disciples during his agony in the Garden of Gethsemane; he told his disciples to stay awake, be prepared, and pray. He urges us to the vigilance of the heart.

What matters, therefore, is not to know when is the end of time but that we are ready.

The vigilance of the heart is one of the remedies to distraction and dryness of prayer. It unites our heart, mind, and whole being to our Lord Jesus to expect his coming every day and on the last day. It means we are to learn to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, the ears of our hearts open as he speaks and shows himself to us in the Sacred Scriptures and prayer and most especially in the Eucharist.

The Prayer of St. Martin of Tours, the patron saint of soldiers, speaks about this disposition. He prayed: "Lord, if your people still need my services, I will not avoid the toil. Your will be done. I have fought the good fight long enough. Yet if you bid me continue to hold the battle line in defense of your camp, I will never beg to be excused from failing strength. I will do the work you entrust to me while you command. I will fight beneath your banner."

God bless you!

Fr. Manny Hewe
Pastor