

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time – The End Times (Luke 21:5-19)

We may not like it, we may deny it, we may resist it but the reality is things are changing. Our world is changing, the church is changing, our lives are changing. Sometimes change is welcome, but there are days when change brings loss or the fear of loss - days when our life is forever changed, the world is different, and nothing is like it used to be. You and I know those days. We could each tell stories about those days. They are stories about the death of a loved one, the diagnosis, a divorce, the business that failed, the job that was lost. They are stories about the day you realized the life you were living was not the life you wanted, the day someone confronted you with your addiction, the day you became the parent and caretaker to your own parent....stories of dreams and hopes never realized.

It is not like it used to be when we were growing up. These are the days when the temples of our life and world fall. It is not just our individual temples, however. Tuesday night brought about great change and many of our temples fell. But no matter where any of us stood on the eve of this change, we have to love one another as a people and as a country, now that it's over. We all live still together, and (hopefully) we're all good people with different ideas. Fr. Daniel P. Horan, OFM, author of 'God is Not Fair, and Other Reasons for Gratitude,' writes that 'no matter what divides us, our shared humanity means we always have something in common—we are all made for God!'

We all have temples. Some have been given to us, others we've built for ourselves. Sometimes our temples are people, places, values & beliefs, institutions, dreams. Regardless, they are the things we think structure and order our lives, give meaning and identity, provide security and stability. At least we think they do, until they fall.

In the gospel some were speaking about the temple building, its beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God. The temple was the center of Jewish life. Jesus looks at it and says, "The days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down." Jesus is speaking about more than just the physical temple in Jerusalem.

Change has a way of pushing us into the future and many people begin looking for signs. What will happen now? What do I do? How do I get through this? If we are not careful we'll soon be living in a future we don't yet have. We'll be living in a future created in our heads. When Jesus describes things that will happen he is not asking us to speculate about the future, but offering signs that call us to be faithful in the present.

Sometimes, after our temple falls, we look for a scapegoat, someone to blame or even demonize. Some people simply give up and walk away...they see nothing left...all is lost and the situation hopeless. Some become angry, resentful, fight back. Others say it's God's will. Many look for easy answers, quick fixes, something that will prop up the old structures and ways of doing things. But none of these are Jesus' responses.

Jesus' response is just the opposite. Be still, be quiet, don't be led astray. Don't allow your life to be controlled or determined by fear. Endure, be faithful, steadfast, persevere here and now. If we can't find God here, in our present circumstances, even in the midst of our temple ruins, we won't find God anywhere. Jesus calls us to be present and faithful in whatever circumstances we find ourselves - called to remain so no matter how uncomfortable life may be. Then we'll discover that God has always been with us – in the changes, and the chaos of life; in the pain, loss, and disappointment; in the destruction of our temples.

As long as Christianity remains steadfast to its faith in God, to seeking the truth, to human compassion and justice, it cannot disappear. And we are called to bear to these things. It requires a great inner strength, courage and conviction to put truth, love, justice above one's own family and friends and to suffer for it. Jesus promises, "I myself will give you an eloquence and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to resist or contradict" - words that have been proven true again and again.

We can all tell the story of the day our temple was destroyed. Too often we believe and live as if that is the end of the story. The greater story is how we discovered God next to us in the temple ruins and how God rebuilt what we could not. It is the ongoing story of God recreating life out of loss and ruin, a story of God rejoicing and delighting in us.

Endurance, perseverance, stability are the ways we offer God the fallen stones of our temples. Stone by stone God rebuilds our life and restores the original beauty of our life and world. Stone by stone a new temple rises up from the rubble and we become the temple of God. That's the story that needs to be told.

There will always be people who hate the Gospel message, who find it very threatening. As Christians, we're called to live and to proclaim a set of values and a vision of life that challenges the viewpoints and lifestyles of most societies.

How should we react to these readings? Listen carefully to Jesus' warnings. There will be an end to things, even those things we feel must last forever. And don't be panicked into seeing the end even in major catastrophes.

The end of the world that is our universe may be from all evidence far away. We may be fortunate to live in a society free from wars, famine and natural disasters, free from religious persecution or discrimination. Yet, there is another end we all have to face and which is totally outside our control: the end of our own life here on earth.

The end of the Church year is close, so we are invited to think about the final end of things. Our world, where we spend so much time planning and securing our worldly future, is only temporary. Our own lives here will not last forever. The plans we make must always be conditional and take our final destiny into account.

There is only one effective way to prepare: to live each day fully in the company of Jesus. We do not prepare for the end by guaranteeing our future (**we can't**) but by living fully with God and for God at every moment of every day.

We can do this by personal prayer; by absorbing the message of the Gospel so much into our way of seeing life that it permeates everything we say and do; we become “other Christs” by learning to find Jesus, to love and respond to him in every person, in every place and in every experience of our daily life.

This story is the holy gospel of Jesus Christ according to us. It is real, sacred, and true. Trust the story...tell it over and over to ourselves, proclaim it to the world, and live it. Then, no matter when Jesus comes to take us, we will be more than ready. We will meet not as strangers but as intimate friends who know each other well.

Shortly, we will have our Healing Service and anointing for those who need our prayers for illnesses. I would ask that while we are at prayer, we all raise our country in prayer to God for spiritual healing...that we may all come together in peace and unity and let what divides us fall away so that we may truly be the people of God.

Deacon Gregory Cecere

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Excerpts from **Michael K. Marsh** and from www.sacredspace.ie