

Thirty-third Sunday Cycle B November 18, 2018

The Gospel today, dear friends, begins with Jesus speaking to his disciples “about the end which is to come.” I am getting to that point in life when I am thinking a little bit more about the end. It is really not a bad thing to do. It is not something that should cause us to feel depressed. The saints have often recommended that we think about the end, though generally they tended to think of heaven.

Today Jesus is reminding us that time is moving on. Just as we have a beginning, so too our life on earth will come to an end. While we live upon this earth we are essentially pilgrims. Our bodies were not designed to last more than a few generations at most. Like cars and computers our bodies have a built-in obsolescence. Just as batteries blow up, tires go flat, engines conch out and files get corrupted, so too our bodies break down and eventually shut down.

I don't find what Jesus is saying depressing so much as hopeful. Yes, hopeful! Listen to what he says, “In those days, after the time of suffering....” He says, “after the time of suffering!” Suffering is not something that is going to last forever. Suffering will come to an end. For now it seems to have the upper hand. It is one catastrophe, one tragedy, one crisis, after another. There seems to be no end to it. It is the same all over the world: persecutions, oppressions, poverty, sickness, violence, murder, not counting the natural disasters, like fires and floods and earthquakes. It is one crisis after another, not just some other place, but closer to home, in our own families. It is a miracle that people still get up and go to work. People make an act of faith that what they do is still meaningful. So we carry on and try to do the best we can.

So it is a great source of comfort to learn that suffering will come to an end. But what happens after the time of suffering? What Jesus tells us next gives an even greater cause for hope. “Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in clouds,’ with great power and glory. Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.”

In the first explicit reference to resurrection of the body in the Bible, the prophet Daniel foretold: “Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting disgrace.” In the Gospel for today, Jesus confirms it. God will gather his elect, his chosen ones, to himself. Now about that day or hour no one knows. No one, except the Father knows. Jesus with his human mind, Jesus did not know. Just like us there are some things that Jesus did not know.

So what did Jesus accomplish? The letter to the Hebrews describes his work as a single sacrifice for sins for all time. It will never have to be repeated. It is effective for all time. He died once for all. The whole life of Jesus was a sacrifice, an offering up of his whole self to the Father, holding nothing back out of love for us.

Having ascended to the Father, Jesus “sat down at the right hand of God.” Now what is that all about? Why is Jesus now sitting down? Is his work done? Is he retiring? No! Not at all! By sitting at the right hand of God, Jesus now takes up his rightful place. Now from his throne, from his chair, *ex cathedra*, he will direct his Church. With Jesus’ return to his heavenly Father a new age begins: the age of the Church. The earthly ministry of Jesus has come to completion. The Church now will continue the ministry of Jesus in the world.

The Church is the Body of Christ. Jesus not only sits at the right hand of God in heaven, he is also present in the world through his body which is his Church. Through the proclamation of the Word, the celebration of the Sacraments and through the ministry of compassion, deeds of love and works of mercy, Jesus continues his work of healing and stirring up in the hearts of people the hope and longing for salvation.

It is for good reason that Pope Francis speaks of the Church as a field hospital on the battlefield of this world. We live in a world where many people have been deeply wounded; they feel lost and forgotten and many have given up. “Only an excess of love can save the world” [Jacques Philippe]. Inspired by love, the kind of love that Jesus showed, we can do much to alleviate some of the sufferings we see around us.

You and I, who claim to be believers as we say in our creed, are the Body of Christ in the world. To the extent that we align our lives with his and allow him to live and work in us, he will make all our poor efforts bear much fruit. We will learn that Jesus is not only sitting at the right hand of the Father. We will learn that Jesus is working in a powerful way in and through you and me. Together we can make a difference. We can make the world a better place right where we are. We can alleviate some of the suffering we encounter by our kindness and works of mercy. Even the words we use have power. Remember Jesus. He healed some people with a word. The words we use can hurt. They can also heal.

Long ago, the prophet Daniel wrote: “Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.” We now know that those celestial bodies we call stars will not in fact burn bright forever, but those luminaries we call the saints, whose hearts are aflame with divine love will shine for all eternity.

“Heaven and earth will pass away,” Jesus says, “but my words will not pass away.” We can not only take Jesus at his word, we can also live his words every day of our lives.

The time will come when sufferings will come to an end and all that our God has promised will be fulfilled. In the meantime, we still have some time, for a time. Time is God's gift to us; what we do with our time is our gift to God. Listen to the words of a little poem:

When I was a child I laughed and wept, then time crept.

When I was a youth, I grew more bold. Then time strolled.

When I became a man, then time ran.

And when older still, I grew. Then time flew.

Soon I shall be passing on. Then time will be gone.

As with all God's gifts we are stewards, not owners, of time. We can't store it up. We can only use it. How will you use the time that God has given you?

Fr. Neil