

Homily for the 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time - C November 18, 2007

Malachi 3:19-20a

2 Thessalonians 3:7-12

Luke 21:5-19

Jesus predicted the fall of the temple
and he suffered, died and rose from the dead, around the year 33.

It was in the year 70

that the city of Jerusalem and the temple were indeed destroyed.

It's 10-15 years after the fall of Jerusalem

that Luke writes his gospel,

putting his text some 50 years after the time of Christ.

In that intervening time Christians:

suffered; were subject to violent arrest;

hauled in court before religious and civil authorities,

imprisoned, and some put to death.

All has Jesus had said.

The timeline here tells us that everything Jesus predicts in this passage

has already taken place by the time Luke writes about it.

So what we have here is less a prediction of the future

and more an interpretation of what is already past.

The words of Jesus, then, help Luke's first audience

to interpret what they have been through.

They have lived through what Jesus said:

"Things are going to fall apart.

Your community of faith will be devastated.

Your beautiful house of worship will be taken from you.

Those who come in my name will deceive and betray you.

Friends, neighbors, even family members

will deem your faith old fashioned and foolish.

War and terror will frighten you.

Things you never dreamed would happen - will happen."

Jesus tells us to expect calamity,

that we'll need to endure such as this

and that by our perseverance

we will secure our lives in faith.

This is perseverance in the midst of:

deception by those we trusted;

the dismantling of what we depended on;

and the devastation of things we cherished.

Perhaps for us, too,

the text is less a prediction of what is to come

and more an interpretation of what we have experienced.

It is not that Jesus *desires* all of this but that he knows

that times will come which will

sicken us like a plague;

starve our hearts like a famine;
and shake us to the core like an earthquake.

And he urges us in the midst of all this:

Persevere in faith that you might secure that life which has no end.

The images in the gospel are those of gloom.

But in today's first scripture the Lord promises that

justice, like the *sun*, will rise
and shine *rays of healing* on those who have suffered
and who have *persevered* in faith.

The dark skies of the present may tempt us to loose faith,
like the chosen people returning from exile,
wondering if the Lord is still with us,
if the sun justice will truly rise.

But precisely what the Lord asks of us

is that we stand faithful, trusting that his healing
will bring a new day.

This week many of us will find ourselves in the company of

"parents, brothers and sisters, relatives, and friends"
for Thanksgiving Day dinner

and there's a good chance the conversation will, at some point,
turn to the Catholic Church and its many problems.

This is even *more* likely to happen at tables where one of you is present
if others know you still go to church.

Some may question your *faithful perseverance*
and ask you to offer some reason for it.

Let the Lord, as he promised, give you a word of wisdom
with which to respond.

And remember: there is no defense for betrayal or needless destruction
- so you need not offer any.

We acknowledge the terrible mistakes of the past and,
even as St. Paul urged us today, we continue to work
at building up the temple of Christ's body, the Church.

We believe that even when "no stone is left upon a stone,"
the temple of Christ's body, us, his people, survives
because Christ has conquered all things - even death.

And that is why here, every week, we gather to be fed

by the light no darkness has extinguished,
the word whose truth is forever,
and the sacrament whose healing rays
rise bright upon us in the Eucharist.

In a gentle way, invite the others at your Thanksgiving table

to come home to this table or one like it where they live

that they might be nourished to persevere in the faith
that offers life without end.

- *Rev. Austin Fleming*