

THIRTY THIRD SUNDAY OF ORD TIME C

WORLD DAY OF THE POOR

The End of Jerusalem. The End of Time (Lk 21:5ff.).

Introduction

The temple in Jerusalem was in all its glory during the lifetime of Jesus. It was totally destroyed as a place of worship in 70 AD, nearly forty years after his death. Not too many of those who had heard his prophecy about its destruction would actually have witnessed the appalling event. Nor did it prove possible to obliterate the site completely. The foundation stones were too massive; some are one hundred tons in weight. The details of the whole tragedy are recounted by an eye-witness account of the events, namely by the Jewish historian Josephus who wrote the *The Wars of the Jews*, New Updated Edition Hendrickson Publishers, Inc. 1987, Book 6 chapter 6.

Collective Loss

Pilgrims and tourists return to historical sites for information and inspiration. We all need historical knowledge to understand better the origins and fate of peoples and places. ‘Not a stone will be left upon a stone’, said Our Lord to his then temple- admiring disciples. Such was his expectation, based probably on what he had seen in other ruins in the Palestine of his day. It seemed that the End Time-the end of the world- would come then, but it did not. There was a lot of history yet to unfold, as St.Luke would narrate in The Acts of the Apostles.

Society-community

Collective experiences are essential to human flourishing; we could not otherwise survive as societies. We have to accept the bad with the good. This is very biblical: the one and the many, the individual and the society. The Church is people, variously described as the People of God, the Temple of the Holy Spirit, the Communion of Saints. In it we are always faced with the bad and the good. At the beginning of every Mass we say the ‘I’ and ‘we’. “Let *us* call to mind our sins”, and then “*I* confess”. “Lord *I* am not worthy”. We notice the interplay of the personal and the communal as in the ‘Our Father... give *us* this day etc.’. We are in this together. This is most obvious in consecrated community life, and in committed married life. Such is our community experience. This is our family. And we identify with all the entailments in it bad and good. We all rejoice when one of our family succeeds. We all cry when one of our family dies. This is the way we live. Realism shows how much we depend on each other. Excessive individualism or impersonal structures diminish this foundational reality and can destroy our human relationships.

Personal Loss

It is said of the famous Anglican Professor friend of Newman, E.B.Pusey, that when his wife died he decided that he would never smile again... ..except with children. That was his mourning fidelity to his wife. But what of everyone else’s needs around him? We think of this especially this Sunday as we pay attention to the world day of the poor. Individualism ignores the poor; one takes care of oneself; everyone else is of secondary importance. Our Lord excoriated this in the famous parable of Dives and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31). And in the same vein he used the parable of the rich fool (Lk 12:16-21). Pope Francis has recently written a long letter on this world day of the poor (June 2019): “Before all else, the poor need God and his love, made visible by ‘the saints next door’, people who by the simplicity of their lives express clearly the power of Christian love. God uses any number of ways and countless means to reach people’s hearts. Certainly, the poor come to us also because we give them food, but what they really need is more than our offer of a warm meal or a sandwich. The poor need our hands, to be lifted up; our hearts, to feel anew the warmth of affection; our presence, to overcome loneliness. In a word, they need love.” As we listen this Sunday to Our Lord speaking about the End of Time, we notice the connection made between the selfish rich and their fate after death and the poor they have often exploited in their life time.

Facing the End

St.Luke's Gospel underlines this teaching. Our Lord asked his hearers to be sensible in daily living because death may come at any time. He was anticipating his own experience in Jerusalem. He would suffer abandonment by family and friends. He had already suffered rejection in the synagogue; he would face rejection in the Temple. He would be hauled before kings and governors. He was seemingly hated by all in his final days. Who was poorer than he?

St.Paul insists in today's second reading at Mass, from 2 Thessalonians: 'You know how you are supposed to imitate us....we worked night and day, slaving and straining so as not to be a burden on any of you...in order to make ourselves an example'. Paul was correcting the false individualistic interpretation of some Thessalonians about the End of Time. He insisted that we must live in this world doing our best, as individuals and together, to serve the will of the creator who alone determines the end of the world. Believers live always with this mystery. All the most important daily things in our life belong to mystery. Why we are here now in this moment of history, why we are still alive when so many of our immediate family and friends and contemporaries are dead, why we may have had an easier life than our parents. Questions like these figure daily in our lives. They are asked by every thinking person looking for life's meaning.

Conclusion

As we approach Advent, and leave the present liturgical year behind, we are once again invited to think of the future realistically. Today's Communion antiphon says: it is good for me to be with the Lord and to put my hope in him. And the Communion Prayer says: Father, may we grow in love. That sums it all up for us. Our End of Time is: "Love that moves the sun and the other stars", Dante, *Paradiso*, Canto XXXIII, last line). A happy Sunday to you all. Amen.

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