

Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time B/2012

The readings of this Sunday talk about the end of time. They show that the world, as we know it, will one day come to an end. They also invite us to prepare ourselves for the second coming of the Lord.

The first reading of the book of Daniel describes in symbolic language the end of time. It shows that when that day will come, Michael, the prince of God's Angels, will rise and set the world on judgment. It shows also that that day will be a time of distress for all the inhabitants of the earth, but God's people will escape. On that very day, the wise and the just will rise from the dead and shine like the stars, while the evildoers will suffer punishment.

What is behind this text is the idea of the affirmation of the fragility of the world. In that sense, nothing on earth is eternal, because one day the world and all it contains will come to an end. There is also the idea of the retribution that will occur at the end of time, as the just will live forever and the unrighteous will be punished.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus talks about the end of time. First of all, the Gospel starts with Jesus' speech addressed to his disciples. In this speech, he talks to them about the end that will be a time of great tribulation where the elements of the earth like the moon, the stars and the powers of heavens will be shaken. Then, he speaks to them about the coming of the Son of Man with great power and glory. He announces to them that when he comes, he will send his angels to collect all his elect from all over the four points of the world.

In order to give them a hint about what will happen, he gives them the example of a fig tree whose springing of the branches announces the coming of summer. For Jesus, this generation will not pass without these things happening. Even if heaven and earth will pass away, his words will not pass away.

Finally, Jesus finishes his speech with the announcement of his Father's secret in the sense that everything of what he talks about depends on his father alone and not someone else.

What do we learn from this Gospel? The first thing I want to highlight is about the truth on the end of the world. When we look at the unfolding of human history, we realize that the world has always been there. It has existed in the past; it exists now and, very likely, it will exist tomorrow. For instance, we are the children of our parents, who, in turn, are children of their own parents who are our great-grand parents. Our great-grand parents are children of their own parents who are our great-great grandparents, and so on.

Such an observation gives us the impression of being engaged in a perpetual cycle of birth-death that characterizes our genealogy, from our parents to our great-great-grandparents. Even when, as adults, we get married, we keep the hope to become great parents and even great-great grand parents. All that gives the impression that the world is eternal, that as it was in the past, so will it be in the future.

The truth, however, is that the world will one day come to an end. That is why Jesus says that heaven and earth will pass away, but not his words. Even if Jesus describes the signs preceding his return, these should not be taken literally, as fundamentalists

do. Because, we are not dealing with a material event that can be predicted according to the laws of the physics of the universe, but rather a spiritual event that transcends human history and its laws. It is for that specific reason that Jesus says that nobody knows the time and the hour the world will come to an end, except his Father.

If that is true, then, what is required from us is to be vigilant in the awaiting of that moment. What is important in that perspective is not to know when the time will come, but how it will find us. Our attitude of faithfulness to the Lord and preparedness of our hearts on a daily basis is more important than anything else we can do.

The second thing I want to highlight is about the time of the end with regard to the historical perspective. What do I mean by that? In fact, when we account for history, we refer to three important moments, namely the past, the present and the future. Our life makes sense to us only when we refer to these moments.

The past is about the things that are behind us and we cannot change anymore. Perhaps from the past can we draw lessons for the present, but we cannot change it. What is past is past. The present is about the things which are under our control and we are dealing with right now. We can give to our present a good or a bad orientation, because it is still in our hands, even if it happens that we cannot control everything. The future is unknown to us and mostly unpredictable, even if it is true that we can anticipate it and even guess how it can be, given the trends we have in the present. That is the object of the science we call prospective. Does prospective give a right picture of the future? That is a very disputable matter and I do not want to get into such a discussion.

With regard to this historical perspective, let us try to understand the coming of Jesus. The first coming of Jesus refers to the past of our faith, but it is a past that engages us today because we are Christians. It is like being the great-great children of our great-great parents who do not exist anymore, but whose past existence gives meaning to our life today.

But, Jesus has not come only two thousand years ago. He comes every day, today. As the book of Revelation (3: 20) says, "Here I stand, knocking at the door. If anyone hears me calling and opens the door, I will enter his house and have supper with him, and he with me". If that is true, then, our problem today is that of recognizing the presence of Jesus who comes to us. Today becomes the time of preparing us for the final moment of the return of Jesus. If we cannot side with him today, it will be difficult to side with him at his final coming.

Finally, the ultimate moment of his coming in the future is unknown to us. What we have to do is to await it with patience, eagerness and fidelity so that when he comes, he may find us ready and prepared. Let us, then, pray that the Lord may give us the grace of staying alert and vigilant until we meet him at his return. May God bless you all!

Daniel 12: 1-3; Hebrews 10: 11-1, 18; Mark 12: 24-32



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