

33rd SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

St. Mark 13:24-32

The tone of the readings proclaimed in the Mass reflect the Church's year; as the time of Church's year draws to a close so the readings draw together the life of faith and point us to its fulfillment at the end of time. In the Gospel the Lord prophesies His return. He sits on the Mount of Olives across the Kedron Valley and looking to the Temple; the temple that had held the glory of God stands opposite Jesus, the new and eternal temple of God. In words that He will repeat before the High Priest, Caiaphas, on the death of the crucifixion, He says: "You will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of Heaven." Then He will be speaking of His resurrection after His death which Caiaphas will seek. Here, to His disciples, He says, "they will see 'the Son of Man coming in the clouds' with great power and glory," speaking of the fulfillment of the world at the end of time. It is a prophecy reminiscent of the prophecy of Daniel heard in the first reading: "[T]he wise shall shine brightly like the splendour of the firmament, and those who lead the many to justice shall be like the stars forever."

So many books and films have been written and produced that portray the end of time or armageddon or the apocalypse. All of these threaten a time of great distress by which we can only be freed by a handful of men and women or the U.S. government. We are expected to live in fear because fear sells, as we have seen over these past two years. In part these books and movies have got it right for there is and there will be times of great distress. The Lord says as much: "In those days after that tribulation the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from the sky, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken." What they get wrong is the next part for the Lord doesn't say that we shall see Will Smith or the American president

coming on the clouds of heaven. We already have a saviour but for those who refuse to believe then nothing and no one can save.

We were not created to suffer but by our choices and the choices of others we do suffer. So determined is God to free us from our enslavement to hurt and pain that He shared our life with us. In His coming as a child, born of the Blessed Virgin Mary, He sought to draw all men and women of every time and place to Himself. In His second coming as the resurrected and glorified Christ who by His own suffering will seek to draw all men and women to Himself. All new life is born amidst pain; the pain a mother bears as she gives birth to her child, the pain Christ bore on the Cross as He gave new birth to every man and woman, and the pain you and I must bear as we give birth to faith and hope. This is why the Lord uses the image of the fig-tree for the fig-tree is the last tree to put forth its leaves in spring and so when it does it is a sign that summer is soon here. It is an image of hope, for when it seems that the tree will never produce its leaves it does and right on the cusp of the fullness of life of which summer reminds us. In His first coming Christ stood on the cusp between the old temple and the new temple. When He comes again He will stand on the cusp of our earthly life and our eternal life.

Already, however, Christ has begun his return but we see Him now as amidst the clouds for we experience His presence and His grace behind the symbols of the sacraments, in the words of the Gospels, and in the appearances of bread and wine. These things hide the reality of His grace, of His body and blood, but they also point us to the fulfillment of that reality which awaits the saints in heaven, when nothing shall conceal His love. For now, we must accept His presence amidst clouds of suffering and Sacraments and persevere in faith and hope and love so that what we suffer in our lives and what we receive in the Sacraments, will be united with His suffering and His grace so that we will reflect His life and when He finally does come in great power and glory we will recognise Him and He will recognise us and we will be caught up into Heaven.