

LOOKING AT LIFE THROUGH THE LENS OF THE GOSPEL



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**THIRTY-THIRD SUNDAY
IN ORDINARY TIME**

17th November 2024

Mark 13:24 Jesus said: “But in those days, after

that suffering,

the sun will be darkened,

and the moon will not give its light,

²⁵ and the stars will be falling from heaven,

and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

²⁶ Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in clouds’ with great power and glory. ²⁷ 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.

Mark 13:28 “From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. ²⁹ So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. ³⁰ Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. ³¹ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

Mark 13:32 “But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

At the close of the liturgical year, the readings turn to the end of time, a theme which forms a bridge with the first Sunday of Advent, which begins (!) with the end of time.

KIND OF WRITING

All of Mark 13 is “apocalyptic”, a type of writing which is highly symbolic and can be difficult to decipher. Normally, apocalyptic writings are written for faith groups—Jewish or Christian—who are under pressure or persecution of some kind. The message is usually an assurance that the future really is in God’s hands, in spite of appearances, and not to lose faith. “Endurance” is the key virtue, expressed in Mark with the command to stay awake.

The apocalyptic writings usually try to unmask the apparent omnipotence of the (current) empire. Mark 13 seems, in part, to have been written up in the light of the threatened or real destruction of Jerusalem, when the Romans would raise their idolatrous standards in the Temple itself.

At the time of writing, the death and resurrection of Jesus were interpreted as part of the end, the first instalment: But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. (1 Cor 15:20)

In general, Mark is saying that no historical or political event can be taken as an unequivocal indication of the end. The disciples must be content with

(a) not knowing, just as Jesus himself did not know and

(b) suffering, again just as Jesus himself did.

Thought for the day

Our expression “to have time for someone” is a heart-warming one, because giving time to someone is a real gift of myself, part of our consciousness of being human. The opposite—lack of time—is expressed in another idiom “Money rich but time poor.” To be poor in time is a great deprivation, even when self-inflicted. It is all a question of perspective, values and choices. We do need to value the fleeting time we have and not live only towards a future, as yet unreal, moment. In the words of St Paul, Look, now is the acceptable time; look, now is the day of salvation! (2 Corinthians 6:2)

The last chapter of Mark before the events of Easter is sometimes called a “little apocalypse”. Aware of their Jewish roots the first Christians made use of apocalyptic writing to present the victory of Jesus over sin and death. Their belief was that the resurrection had ushered in the last days and that Jesus would return soon. Therefore there was an urgency to their preaching of the gospel and we get a flavour of that from this reading. As we approach the end of another liturgical year, the church invites us to reflect on the fact that we are moving towards an ultimate goal, and that no matter how bad things may get God has triumphed and will triumph again. This type of literature is hard for us to relate to as it seems rather dark and fantastic but it is a literature of hope and that is its perennial value.

SEAN GOAN—Let the Reader Understand, Year B

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. Jesus speaks of the established order falling apart, but the collapse of the old order opened the way for new possibilities. Our church is in crisis, and the world is facing climate disaster. Where have you seen something new and hopeful emerge in the midst of all this, e.g. some action arising from better eco awareness (less waste, a community garden, et al)?
2. The parable of the fig tree. Even in winter it begins to put forth leaves which give a hint of the fruit to come. Where have you found signs of hope in a wintry situation – in your own life, in the life of some group, in the life of the Church, in our world?
3. Jesus proposes no clear time-scale for the events being foretold, so the final sentence (v.32) is a call to alertness, to live the present to the full. What difference does it make to you when you are able to live the present moment to the full?

JOHN BYRNE OSA—Intercom

This is a teaching about the end of the world. We must however start by letting it remind us of other experiences, times when things whose disappearance we believed would mark the end of our little world actually disappeared – and yet we survived! Things that we had thought were destined to last forever turned out to be just temporary. We had taken things for granted - now we are taught by life that it was merely our little “private world” which has come to an “end”. The ancient order has truly passed away and we are now well and truly into a new one. It is one that we hadn’t prepared ourselves for; its advent took us by surprise.

Prayer Reflection

Lord, we remember with gratitude the times of crisis in our lives:

Our world fell apart in those days, after that time of distress.

But you did not abandon us; in the midst of all that turmoil we received a great grace

- we understood for the first time the meaning of faith;
- we discovered inner resources we didn't know we had;
- friends rallied around us.

We experienced you sending your angels to gather us, from the ends of the world to the ends of heaven.

MICHEL DE VERTEUIL—Lectio Divina on the Sunday Gospels

This reading is part of the apocalyptic discourse in Mark’s gospel. We associate apocalyptic with doomsday predictions, but the word itself simply means revelation. Mark presents Jesus as the revealer of things to come for a community who were experiencing persecution and who had little chance of turning their situation around.

One thing that is guaranteed in our life is change. As we move through carious paradigm shifts in our Church, in politics, in our personal lives, we realise that everything is in a state of flux. This text urges Mark’s community, and us, to ‘know that God is near’. We can learn deep lessons in times of struggle; we certainly do not come out the other side unchanged.

Life is not a piece of tragic fiction, in which at the end of the reading we all get up and go for drinks. All of us are actors in a great unfolding drama, and until we dig deep we will not have great performances. How each of us carries out our role will affect the end of the play. (Marianne Williamson)

TRÍONA DOHERTY & JANE MELLETT - GO DEEPER

As the years went by, the disciples who had known Jesus were gradually dying. Those who remained believed in him without having seen him. They celebrated his invisible presence in the Eucharist. When would they ever see the splendour of his face? When would their longing to be with him forever be fulfilled? They continued to remember the words of Jesus with love and faith. These words sustained them through the difficult times of persecution. But when would they be able to experience for themselves the truth they enshrined? Would they not slowly begin to forget them? The years were going by without the appearance of the much hoped-for Day of the Lord. What were they to think?

The discourse we find here in Mark is meant to offer believers convictions that would sustain their hope. We must not take them literally. Instead we must try to discover the faith contained in these images and symbols that seem so strange to us today.

JOSÉ A PAGOLA—Following in the Footsteps of Jesus, Year B