

33rd Sunday OT

Mark 13:24-32

Coming of the Son of Man

The longest uninterrupted speech of Jesus to his disciples in Mark takes place at the end of his ministry in Jerusalem, before the story of his Passion begins. Jesus sits on the Mount of Olives from where the whole city and temple were visible. He speaks of future tribulation for city and Temple and the eventual coming of the Son of Man.

Jesus wants to prepare the disciples for this future. At the same time, Mark reassures his readers that God knows about and takes into account the troubles that they were having to endure the persecutions in Rome by Nero.

The *times of persecution and false messiahs*, the subject of the first part of this discourse, are distinguished from the *coming of the Son of Man with his angels*, where he will come to gather in the elect, to bring them home. Such events are to encourage and not to terrify the reader. We recall Paul's similar words of comfort to the Thessalonians. (It does make for a great novel, though, especially the Rapture part, but notice that the author who wrote it and those who read it are still around and waiting to be raptured into paradise.)

It is interesting that Saint Paul also thought that Jesus would return in his time, but that got him into a lot of trouble, since his friends in Thessalonica were dying and the Christian community asked what would happen to their fellow Christians since they were in the ground?

As to the time when all this is to happen, the Gospel gives contrary indications. It will be in the time of this generation, yet not ***even the Son knows the day or the hour***. In that generation, the death and resurrection of Jesus took place, which brought about the end of the old heaven and the old earth. If the time of the end is unknown even to the Son, it is not for human beings to speculate about it. It is more important to remember the words of Jesus which will endure forever.

In *Give Us This Day* reflection, Fr. Joseph Donders writes that this passage is ***not about doom***, but about *distress, pain, dying*. And he adds the distress is not the important thing, nor is the pain the end, and the dying is not the real sign. In fact, Jesus uses ***the image of a fig tree before spring***. The small buds are opening, and new life is born, a pale green shoot, and the old leaves are falling off, signs of hope. In other words, we begin a new cycle. This Church Year Cycle comes to an end and a new one begins again. Like the plants around us, we also go through a cycle of death and then new life, but also growth and a future.

The image of ***grafting a tree*** is a good example of what we must do first by grafting ourselves onto Jesus, onto his words and actions. Grafting also *removes the branches* that block the fruit from developing to their fullest by either because they are shading that branch or because they detour the sap the fruit need to grow to their own branch. And yet, sometimes the initial grafting doesn't take, and we have to do it again, make a fresh grafting and start over. Yet, that new grafting, in some cases, becomes the tree!

We have Spiritual Directors or Guides available and Retreat Houses where we can be renewed each year. Grafting and pruning are free. Our development and growth need all the help we can get to continue in our spiritual life and grow. If we are already in the habit of attending to our spiritual needs, then the End Times should not matter to us, nor will it catch us off guard. It is in our Marianist Rule of Life that the brothers are to make a week retreat each year, a rule of life that every Christian should be encouraged to practice.

Each new generation will be challenged by another wave of persecution and false messiahs that bring their own tribulations and what seems the end of the world or the end of the 'Good Old Days.'" The End Times is another opportunity that challenges us to grow closer to the Lord, especially as we prepare for another Advent where a new Church Cycle begins and where we can look forward to any pruning that needs to be done to encourage any new grown that has started.