

Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time C - He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end

November 13, 2022.

The Church's year is drawing to a close. During the coming weeks, the liturgies invite us to look forward in hope to the glorious fulfilment of God's plan for creation. At the time of Jesus' ministry, the Jewish nation was full of restless expectations – giving rise at times to uprisings seeking to throw off the yoke of Roman occupation. The Jerusalem Temple not only symbolized the nation's life and hopes; it was one of the wonders of the ancient world, filling God's people with joy and pride each time they saw it. The disciples of Jesus would have been shocked, therefore, when Jesus interrupted their buzz of admiration to foretell the Temple's destruction. This prediction was well known - at the trial of Jesus, outrage was expressed that he had spoken of the destruction of the Temple.

Every Sunday when we pray the The Nicene Creed right after the homily, we solemnly profess our belief that ***He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end.*** The Church has never claimed to know when Judgment Day will come. It could be today, it could be 1000 years from now. ***Jesus himself told us that we can know "neither the day nor the hour."*** So if anyone ever comes knocking on your door to tell you the exact date, you can be sure that they are off track. But the fact remains, Jesus is coming again to judge the living and the dead. That's when the battle between good and evil will come to an end. On that day, as this Sunday's First Reading (Malachi 3:19-20a) tells us, ***"Lo, the day is coming, blazing like an oven, when all the proud and all evildoers will be stubble, and the day that is coming will set them on fire, leaving them neither root nor branch"*** Evil will finally be made powerless. Where we will stand on Christ's arrival is decided by what we are trying to be at this moment. Our future happiness is shaped out of our present efforts to turn to God and live life properly. Judgment Day is coming. Jesus is coming again. There will be an end to the battle between good and evil, and good will win. We know this. God has revealed it. Yet the vast majority of humankind, throughout history and even today, do not know this. ***For those who do not know or believe in Christ, the future is a dark and threatening mystery. But for us, it is a coming victory.*** It is comforting to know that, whatever the future holds by way of disappointment or failure, the Lord is in control and will not abandon his people.

Knowing that judgment is coming sets us free to live a full life, because it puts everything in proper perspective. The Emperor Charlemagne is one of the great figures in the history of western civilization. His empire, though not perfect, was a bright chapter in the dark ages of the barbarian invasions of Europe. He preserved western culture and advanced the cause of Christian civilization, planting seeds of holiness and prosperity that would flourish centuries later. His tomb can still be visited in the German city of Aachen [AH-ken], where his Empire was headquartered back in the 800s. He is buried in the central space beneath the dome of the imperial church there, called Aix-la- Chapelle. The burial chamber is a subterranean room. In the middle of the room is a marble chair - a chair on which kings used to be crowned - placed over his grave. On the chair sits a sculpted image of the Emperor, wrapped in his royal robes, with a book of the Gospels open on his lap. There he sits: cold, silent, motionless. The dead man's finger points to the words of Jesus: "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" That was the perspective that made Charlemagne both a great man, great emperor, and also, even more importantly, a great Christian.

Brothers and sisters, we should be grateful to our Lord for revealing the future to us, and for teaching us how to shape our future through following him and his teachings. His revelation in this regard was a preemptive strike against destructive temptations - temptations to know and control the future through evil means. We all know the famous story of Aladdin's lamp and the Genie who has the power to grant three wishes. In the fables, these wishes always somehow turn against the

person making them. The same thing happens in the literature that has come down to us from ancient, pagan Greece. In those stories, anyone who follow the supposed prophecies of pagan oracles would inevitably misinterpret the ambiguous message and cause sorrow and destruction. What's the difference between wishes made to Genies, to pagan powers, and prayers made to the one, true God? The wishes and the pagan rituals are not protected by God's wisdom, but every prayer we utter in Christ's name is. We don't always know what's best for us, but God, our loving Father, does. When we try to prescribe our own happiness apart from God by non-Christian spiritual techniques to uncover and control the future - which is at the heart of all occult practices - we will always make a mess of things. Jesus has told us all we need to know about the future: he will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and until then we will run up against hardships and obstacles amid the joys of fulfilling his will and building up his Kingdom. Striving to know more is a self-destructive slap in the face to our Lord.

Knowing that judgment is coming sets us free to live a full life, because it puts everything in proper perspective. Charles V was one of the last truly great European Emperors. In the 1500s, he protected Europe from the vicious and tireless attacks of the Turkish Muslim Empire. And at the same time he brought together the leaders of Europe to reestablish political and religious unity among Christians after the revolt of Martin Luther. He almost succeeded, until his most powerful ally betrayed him. In the prime of his life, one of his closest and most well loved advisers, who had served the Emperor since his youth, fell ill. Charles was at his bedside as the man was dying. The Emperor was deeply moved at the man's suffering, and wanted to comfort him. He said, "My friend, you have been a faithful servant all these years. Please, let me now do something for you. Ask anything of me, and I will do it." The dying man turned his weak eyes to his King, and whispered, "Sire, there is one great favour I desire....Give me one more day of life - just one day more!" Charles' face fell. He answered simply, "You know that I have not the power." The man smiled weakly, and said: "Yes, I know. **Even the greatest earthly king cannot give life. And now you see how foolish I have been. I served you well all these years, but I gave no thought to my Heavenly King, and now I must go to him with empty hands. Pray for me.**" Those were his last words.

Brothers and sisters, **knowing that Christ's Kingdom will be victorious and last forever has a very practical consequence: it enables us to be more energetic and confident in building up that Kingdom.** Jesus tells his Apostles that they will be persecuted, but they are not to worry, since "it will lead to your giving testimony." This is what we are called to do - to tell others about Christ, to bring them into the Church, so that they too can reestablish an intimate friendship with God and set out on the path to eternal life. So that they can have the same peace of mind that we have from knowing what the future holds. Jesus tells his Apostles that they will even be betrayed by family members, but it doesn't matter, because he will still be protecting them: **"not a hair on your head will be destroyed."** And so, he goes on to tell them, they should never give up in their efforts to follow Christ and help others follow him: **"By your perseverance you will secure your lives."** **As Christians, we are soldiers of Christ. We have been given a share in his mission.** People around us are starving to know the real truth about the future. That's why they are buying books about tea leaves and Tarot Cards and celestial prophecies, about witchcraft and magic and neo-paganism. **Jesus wants to save them from their anxiety and from the dangers of looking for answers in the wrong places. He wants to tell them the real truth about death, judgment, and forgiveness. And he has invited us to be his messengers. We all know someone who needs to hear this message. This week, let's tell them because this is our responsibility as followers of Christ. Let us be messengers of hope and bearers of light in troubled times. Let us have the courage to announce that God is on our side and longs for us to be saved. Our God will never abandon us. Today, when we once again profess our faith in the everlasting future of his Kingdom, let's also renew our commitment to building it. God bless you all.**