

Sunday 17th November 2024

The Second Sunday before Advent

Gospel Reading

Mark 13.1-8

The Destruction of the Temple Foretold

13 As he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!’ 2 Then Jesus asked him, ‘Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.’

3 When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, 4 ‘Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?’ 5 Then Jesus began to say to them, ‘Beware that no one leads you astray. 6 Many will come in my name and say, “I am he!” and they will lead many astray. 7 When you hear of wars and rumours of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. 8 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs.

Other Readings: Daniel 12.1-3 Psalm 16 Hebrews 10.11-14, [15-18] 19-25

Homily

What would we say if we were asked to describe what it is that identifies us as a nation. Perhaps *we* might talk about our social attitudes, our government, our tolerance, our love of forming a queue?

Or perhaps we might see our identity represented in Westminster Abbey or Buckingham Palace or maybe in the majesty of the Lake District, the white cliffs of Dover, our ‘green and pleasant land’.

For the Jewish people of Jesus’ day, national identity was bound up with the Temple in Jerusalem and the worship and sacrifices that happened there. King Solomon built the first temple in Jerusalem and despite being destroyed and rebuilt again it was still there many centuries later. It’s hard to underestimate the importance of the Temple to Jewish people.

So, when Jesus talks about its massive stones being thrown down, that must have been shocking to those around him.

And it did happen – the Romans destroyed the temple in 70 AD and very little of it is left today.

But of course, Jesus is talking about more than the destruction of a building.

This isn't Jesus the healer come to set the captives free, to uphold the weak and the marginalised, or even Jesus the teacher who tells stories to help us see our failings and encourages us to Love our Neighbour as ourselves.

This is a different Jesus, more like an Old Testament Prophet with a message of fire and fury. Like Daniel, whose words we have also heard today, talking of destruction and deliverance.

Jesus is telling his disciples that the centre of the Jewish world will fall and that this is a message to us that all things will eventually fall apart before, as we are told later in this passage, we see the Son of man coming in great power ... to gather his people.

Be prepared for trouble, in short, but 'It will be alright in the end, and if it's not alright, it's not the end' – as the saying goes.

It is hard to interpret what the Bible says about the end times- as we read the words in Daniel, the book of Revelation and here Jesus' own words. But we need to remember that these passages are 'Apocalyptic' – heavy with metaphor, not to be taken too literally. The overall message is that Jesus' death and resurrection gives him ultimate victory over evil - and allows us the possibility of an eternal relationship with God.

But when we look around the world we live in, his prediction of wars, rumours of wars, nation rising against nation seems very close to home.

Jesus Disciples want to know when all of this will happen, and many in the Church have had similar pre-occupations – trying to work out when 'all of this will happen' in our time frame. Jesus' answer to that is simple later on in v 32 he says – no-one knows! He warns His disciples to be careful, not to be distracted by teachers claiming truth that even He doesn't have.

Our reading in Hebrews takes us away from this uncomfortable vision of the end times and tells us a little more. Hebrews is a very 'Jewish' book, full of 'temple' imagery and language. The writer sees Jesus as our great High Priest, the sacrifice he offered was the very last sacrifice that was needed – His own life given for us to open the door for us to a relationship with God based on faith in him and eternally sealed by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The temple is no longer needed. Sacrifices no longer need to be offered, and the world outside of Judaism can now enter the Kingdom of God.

Jesus, the light for the Gentiles promised through the Prophet Isaiah has done his work.

In John 2, 19 Jesus says that if the temple is destroyed he will raise it again in three days. He is talking about his own death and resurrection. God's own Son given for us that we might not perish but have everlasting life.

As the temple was the centre of Jewish identity so Jesus is now the centre of ours.

Conversation Questions

1. What might we do to make sure that the world around us does not distract us from our relationship with Jesus
2. What is it that defines us as people, and to what extent does that reflect Jesus in the way others might see us.
3. Is there anything else from the passage not already discussed that speaks to you? What is it?
4. What will you do this week in your Monday-to-Saturday ministry in response to what you have heard today? #everydayfaith

Prayer

Spend some time in prayer, responding to what you have heard today and listening to what God might be saying to you.

Collect of the day

*Heavenly Father,
whose blessed Son was revealed
to destroy the works of the devil
and to make us the children of God and heirs of eternal life:
grant that we, having this hope,
may purify ourselves even as he is pure;
that when he shall appear in power and great glory
we may be made like him in his eternal and glorious kingdom;
where he is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.*

(or)

*Heavenly Lord,
you long for the world's salvation:
stir us from apathy,
restrain us from excess
and revive in us new hope
that all creation will one day be healed
in Jesus Christ our Lord.*

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