

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, November 18th, 2018, Year B

Near the end of the liturgical year, the Church turns to readings about the end of life and the end of time. We are brought to consider the end of the world and also to consider how well prepared we are for our own last days.²

Daniel 12:1-3

“Daniel” is Hebrew for “God has judged.” The author had to remain anonymous or face death under Antiochus Epiphanes IV, the Hitler of his time who tried to eradicate the Jewish religion and enforce his brand of paganism. This prophecy of final redemption is a hopeful revelation to Israel in the midst of exile in Babylon. The nation will face further conquests by other powerful nations, Daniel is told, but in the end “the wise will shine brightly like the splendor of the firmament.”¹

1In those days, I Daniel, heard this word of the Lord: “At that time there shall arise Michael, the great prince, guardian of your people; Michael is an archangel. He is one of the “chief princes” who assists Gabriel on behalf of the Jews. He is the leader of the angelic hosts in the battle between the dragon and his angels. In the Christian liturgy Michael is the protector of the Church and the angel who escorts the souls of the departed into heaven.⁶ **it shall be a time unsurpassed in distress since nations began until that time. At that time your people shall escape, everyone who is found written in the book.** In Ex. 32: 30-33, Moses asks God to forgive the sin the people committed in making the golden calf and if he won't, Moses then asks to be “stricken out of the book that you have written.” The Lord answered, “Him only who has sinned against me will I strike out of my book.” This probably meant that they would die. This book seems to be a list of God's intimate friends.

2Many Daniel proclaims the resurrection not only of martyrs (as happens in 2 Maccabees) but of all, for that is what the word “many” means. The Church, too, in the light of Jesus' teaching, believes that “all the dead will rise, ‘those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment.’”⁵ **of those who sleep in the dust of the earth** Euphemism for “are dead.”³ **shall awake,** They shall come back to life. This passage is the earliest clear reference to the belief in the resurrection of the dead.³ God reveals the resurrection of the dead to his people progressively.⁴ (CCC 992) **some shall live forever, others shall be an everlasting horror and disgrace.**

3But the wise shall shine brightly like the splendor of the firmament, Those who will shine brightest are those who knew and taught the Law.⁴ **and those who lead the many** This is a nickname for Abraham's descendants. God promised him heirs as numerous as the stars. **to justice shall be like the stars forever.”**

Hebrews 10:11-14, 18

This is our last reading from Hebrews. Here the author concludes a long comparison of the priestly work of Christ and the ministry of the priests of the old covenant. The point he makes is that the old sacrifices had to be repeated over and over and even then they did not take away sin. But the sacrifice that Jesus offered need never be repeated because it was a perfect sacrifice that took away all sin for all time. Every celebration of the Eucharist is a memorial of the once-for-all perfect sacrifice of Christ. When we proclaim the mystery of faith (Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again!) notice that we include past, present, and future. Christ will never die again.⁹ Note that while the mass does not re-sacrifice Christ, the new covenant priest re-presents or offers once again, the one sacrifice. This is what distinguishes our worship.⁷

Brothers and sisters:

11 Every priest stands The Old Testament priests had to stand in the presence of Yahweh, offering victims repeatedly. Standing was the correct posture for servants and employees.⁷ **daily at his ministry, offering frequently those same sacrifices that can never take away sins.** Every day in life, so long as the Temple stood, the following sacrifices had to be carried out: every morning and every evening a one year old male lamb, without spot and blemish, was offered as a burnt-offering, which consisted of one tenth of an ephah (bushel) of fine flour mixed with a quarter of a hin (a gallon and a half) of pure oil. In addition, there was a drink-offering, which consisted of a quarter of a hin of wine. In addition to that there was the daily meat-offering of the High Priest which consisted of one tenth of an ephah of fine flour, mixed with oil, and baked in a flat pan. Half was offered in the morning and half in the evening. In addition to that there was an offering of incense before these offerings in the morning, and after them in the evening. Ever since there was a Temple, and so long as the Temple continued to exist, this routine of sacrifice went on. There was a kind of priestly tread-mill of sacrifice. There was no end to this process, and when all was said and done, it still left men conscious of their sin and alienated from God.⁸

12 But this one Jesus **offered one sacrifice for sins, and took his seat** Note the contrast for Christ, as is stated in Psalm 110:1, after his Ascension is *seated* at the right hand of God the Father. In addition to conveying the idea of repose and rest, being seated would be equivalent to receiving royal investiture or to exercising authority. This is the posture of the monarch, the one who is ministered to.⁷ **forever at the right hand of God;** A king's chief minister or heir used to sit on the right of the king, as in a place of special honor. It is also interesting that David pitched his tent to the right of the tabernacle.⁷

13 Now he waits until his enemies are made his footstool. This waiting is the time between Jesus' enthronement at the Ascension and the parousia or end of time. The writer does not indicate whom he understands by the enemies yet to be made subject to Christ. However, it shall happen that all his enemies shall submit to him.³

14 For by one offering he has made perfect forever those who are being consecrated. So fruitful is his sacrifice that those who take part in it, "those who have been sanctified", are thereby perfected: they obtain forgiveness of sins, purity of conscience, access to and union with God. In other words, the source of holiness in men is the sacrifice of Calvary.⁷

18 Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer offering for sin. This is the conclusion drawn from the argument for the superiority of Christ's sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins developed in verses 15-17 and based on the last words of the prophecy of Jer. 31:31-34, where he speaks of the new covenant which will not be imposed on a man from outside but which will be written on his heart. It concludes: "I will not remember any more their sins and their breaches of the law." They will no longer be remembered because they will have been forgiven. The fulfillment of this has come about through Jesus' sacrifice; there is now no more offering for sin.³

Mark 13:24-32

As we come to the end of the liturgical year, the Church presents us with considerations of the last things: death, judgment, Purgatory, Heaven and Hell. It has been said that Christ's life was incomplete without his death. His death was incomplete without his resurrection and his resurrection was incomplete without his return in glory!

Jesus said to his disciples:

24“In those days after that tribulation The CCC tells us that before Christ's second coming the Church must pass through a final trial that will shake the faith of many believers. The persecution that accompanies her pilgrimage on earth will unveil the “mystery of iniquity” in the form of a religious deception offering men an apparent solution to their problems at the price of turning from the truth. The supreme religious deception is that of the Antichrist, a false messiah who will present a way of thinking by which man glorifies himself in place of God and of his Messiah come in the flesh.⁴ (CCC 675) The kingdom will be fulfilled not by a historic triumph of the Church through a progressive increase in size and power, but only by God's victory over the final unleashing of evil. God's triumph over evil will take the form of the Last Judgment.⁴ (CCC 677) **the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light,**

25. and the stars will be falling from the sky, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. Here Jesus is using language frequently employed by the Old Testament prophets to dramatize the cosmic significance of historic events. Even when used in a general way, it refers to some historical event by which God enters into judgment with his people or the nations.¹⁰ Visions of heavenly chaos serve to underscore the magnitude of God's dreadful judgment, that is, it will be a “world-shaking” event.¹² Some Fathers, such as St. Jerome and St. John Chrysostom understand “the powers in the heavens” to mean the angels, who will be in awe at these events.¹¹

26And then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in the clouds’ with great power and glory, God's triumph over the revolt of evil will take the form of the Last Judgment.⁴ (CCC 677)

27and then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the end of the earth to the end of the sky. Jesus Christ here describes his second coming, at the end of time, as announced by the prophet Daniel. He discloses the deeper meaning of the words of the ancient prophet: the “one like a son of man”, whom Daniel saw and to whom “was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him,” is Jesus Christ himself, who will gather the saints around him.¹¹

28Learn a lesson from the fig tree. When its branch becomes tender and sprouts leaves, you know that summer is near.

29In the same way, when you see these things happening, know that he is near, at the gates.

30Amen, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place.

Chapter 13 begins with the disciples and Jesus discussing the destruction of the Temple and the subject turns to “when?” A “generation” was thought of as forty years. That was the length of time it took for the generation of men, which defied Yahweh in the Exodus from Egypt, to die off before Israel could enter into the Promised Land. So Jesus was suggesting that within forty years of that time (around 30 A.D.) the Temple would be destroyed. This did happen in 70 A.D. Why then does Jesus speak of the sun and moon being darkened and the stars falling from the sky? Some commentators suggest that since the Jewish people identified the Heavenly bodies as the governors of time, such calamities in the Heavens would suggest an end of an age. Unusual astronomical occurrences may have accompanied the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. but there is probably a symbolic significance to Jesus' words here as well. (The Jewish historian Josephus reports such

signs in the heavens in chapter 5 of book 6 of his *The Wars of the Jews*.) Was Jesus seen to have come on the clouds of Heaven as a divine Judge in 70 A.D.? Certainly, in predicting the fate of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Jesus was already acting as Judge of the city long before that. So was this a prediction of the end of the world? For the Jews, the Temple and Jerusalem were understood to be symbols of the whole of God's creation. The early Church saw in the events of the period the end of one world and beginning of a new world. We still divide time into those two ages: B.C. and A.D. When the Church looks ahead to the return of Christ at His Second Coming, she believes that the events of that time will parallel the events of 70 A.D. Just as the old world passed away in 70 A.D., as symbolized by the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, the whole world will pass away at some future time, the day and the hour of which remain a secret known only to the Father.¹

31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. With this sentence our Lord adds a special solemnity to what he is saying: all this will definitely come to pass.¹¹

32 But of that day or hour, no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, St. Augustine explains that this was not part of what Jesus needed to know while he was on earth for he voluntarily gave up the unlimited use of his divine attributes when he became a man.¹³ **but only the Father.**" This assumes that time will end. We really need more preparation for this end of time and less calculation!¹³

Some of the material for this commentary has been taken from: (1) Commentary notes from Sean Innerst and Tim Gray, (2) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 2006" by Martin Connell, (3) "The Jerome Biblical Commentary," (4) "Catechism Of The Catholic Church," (5) "The Navarre Bible: Major Prophets," (6) "Dictionary of the Bible" by John L. McKenzie, S.J., (7) "The Navarre Bible: Hebrews," (8) "The Letter To The Hebrews" by William Barclay, (9) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 2003" by Aelred R. Rossier, (10) "Mark: Good News for Hard Times" by George T. Montague, S.M., (11) "The Navarre Bible: St. Mark" (12) "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Mark" With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch and (13) "The Bread of Life Catholic Bible Study" by Deacon Ken & Marie Finn.

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.