

SPIRITUALITY

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Luke 21:28

R⁷. Alleluia, alleluia.

Stand erect and raise your heads
because your redemption is at hand.

R⁷. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Luke 21:5-19; L159C

While some people were
speaking about
how the temple was adorned
with costly stones and
votive offerings,
Jesus said, "All that you see
here—
the days will come when there
will not be left
a stone upon another stone
that will not be thrown down."

Then they asked him,

"Teacher, when will this happen?

And what sign will there be when all
these things are about to happen?"

He answered,

"See that you not be deceived,
for many will come in my name,
saying,

'I am he,' and 'The time has come.'

Do not follow them!

When you hear of wars and
insurrections,

do not be terrified; for such things
must happen first,

but it will not immediately be the
end."

Then he said to them,

"Nation will rise against nation, and
kingdom against kingdom.

There will be powerful earthquakes,
famines, and plagues

from place to place;

and awesome sights and mighty signs
will come from the sky.

Reflecting on the Gospel

The end of the world is a popular topic among some religious people. Apocalyptic doom, fire and brimstone, death and destruction are hallmarks of the violent end of this earth by these preachers. But as we can see from today's gospel, eschatological fervor has been with us from the time of Jesus and even before.

In the decades after Jesus, many claimed to be the Messiah. Some even led certain Jews into rebellion against Rome. But Rome was decisive about striking back. Roman troops led by General Vespasian swept into Judea and Galilee to put down the rebellion. There was a brief pause in the action when the Roman Emperor Nero committed suicide. The year AD 69 saw four emperors, the first three of whom died by suicide or assassination. The fourth was General Vespasian himself, who upon becoming emperor empowered his son Titus as general in his place. Roman troops under his command quickly got back to work and destroyed Jerusalem and its temple.

Many Christians of the time considered these unfolding events a sure sign of the end-times.

And yet Christ's return was delayed. Luke wrote

his gospel in about the 80s in part to deal with dampened and disappointed apocalyptic fervor. Christians were looking for signs that the end was near, as it had seemed to be so clear. Today's gospel story is Luke's way of addressing this topic. Even though many will come claiming to be a Messiah, and there will be wars and insurrections, it will not be the end.

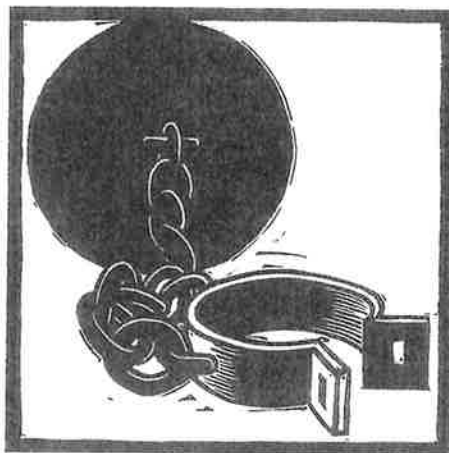
Perhaps the lesson in all of this is that looking for such signs, discerning the events of our day seeking clues to the end of the world is essentially misguided. After nearly two thousand years of such expectation, we are better off concerning ourselves with helping our neighbors, caring for the sick, and comforting the afflicted. There will always be nation rising against nation and kingdom against kingdom. That is unfortunately the experience of our world. The kingdoms of this age tend to promote war. But Jesus preached a kingdom of God, when God himself will rule, putting an end once and for all to unjust systems, practices, and war itself. Then we will experience an age of peace. This is good news indeed.

Living the Paschal Mystery

The *examen* is a Jesuit practice at the end of the day, when one reviews the day's activities discerning God's presence and looking for his direction in our lives. It can help place one's emotions and experiences in a different perspective, sometimes seeing a bigger picture. Events in daily life may take on new meaning with reflection. What seemed to be a critically important encounter may not have been so critical, whereas a small gesture might become more profound upon reflection.

In today's gospel, the disciples want to know when the end of the world is coming. What signs will they be able to read to discern this important time? Jesus responds with a number of various elements that each generation since has interpreted to be fulfilled in their own time and place.

But perhaps we might experience something of the *examen* and reflect on the events in our own lives to see a bigger picture. Perhaps there is more mean-



Continued in Appendix A, p. 315.

ing and more of God's activity in our daily coming and going than we imagine. While it could be more exciting to be on the hunt for clues to Jesus' return, in actuality, nobody knows when that will be! But God is present with us here and now, not only in the apocalyptic future. Let us discern his presence in the quotidian mystery of daily activity, the ebb and flow of our emotions, our existence, and our dying and rising to newness of life.

Focusing the Gospel

Key words and phrases: [D]o not be terrified.

To the point: We began the church year with a gospel much like this one speaking of wars and calamities but with the reassurance also that "when these signs begin to happen, stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand" (Luke 21:28; NABRE). Again, Jesus gives us comfort in the middle of prophecies of wars, insurrections, earthquakes, famines, and plagues when, in today's gospel, he tells the disciples, "[D]o not be terrified." Although the material world may be passing away, there is a firm foundation underfoot, the compassionate care of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Connecting the Gospel

to the first reading: The verses from Malachi in the first reading are among the last of the Old Testament canon. The book of Malachi closes out the prophetic books. Written in the dark times of destruction and exile in the history of Israel, the prophets point to the enduring faithfulness of God. Today's verses reveal God's perfect justice where evil is destroyed through purifying fire and the just are strengthened in the rays of the sun. Light is shed on both, but the results are remarkably different. Today Jesus, in the prophetic tradition, proclaims the light in the darkness. The disciples will undergo persecutions. They will witness nation rising against nation and kingdom against kingdom. But in their persecutions they will be given wisdom to refute their adversaries. *Even if they are put to death not a hair on their head will be destroyed.*

to experience: At times in the life of faith we will need to remember the words of the prophets. In our broken world nations continue to war with each other, and each year brings its share of natural and manmade disasters. However, as people of faith, we look for the light shining in the darkness, the light that will purify our world from evil and heal us in justice.

Connecting the Responsorial Psalm

to the readings: The psalmist proclaims the justice of God who "comes to rule the earth." We are reminded that the earth is the Lord's from the rivers to the mountains, from the seas to the dry land. Jesus tells the disciples not to be afraid even when it seems that their world is being shaken at its foundations. God, Creator of the universe, continues to hold them in love even as they experience persecutions, wars, and earthquakes. Even death cannot ultimately touch them for God is powerful over even death.

to psalmist preparation: Experiencing the beauty and grandeur of creation is a revelation of the Creator. Walking by a river, climbing to the top of a mountain, or witnessing the beauty of a sunset all speak to us of the love of God. This week, find some time to experience God in nature. What do the mountains and rivers, the seas and dry lands tell you about your God?

PROMPTS FOR FAITH-SHARING

Today's psalm calls on creation itself—rivers, mountains, seas, land—to rejoice in God. How have you experienced God in the natural world?

In the second letter to the Thessalonians, St. Paul calls upon the community to imitate his actions. Who has inspired you to imitation in the life of faith: a friend, relative, saint?

Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time, November 17, 2019

Gospel (cont.)

Luke 21:5-19; L159C

"Before all this happens, however,
they will seize and persecute you,
they will hand you over to the synagogues and to prisons,
and they will have you led before kings and governors
because of my name.

It will lead to your giving testimony.

Remember, you are not to prepare your defense beforehand,
for I myself shall give you a wisdom in speaking
that all your adversaries will be powerless to resist or refute.

You will even be handed over by parents, brothers, relatives, and
friends,

and they will put some of you to death.

You will be hated by all because of my name,
but not a hair on your head will be destroyed.

By your perseverance you will secure your lives."