

November 17, 2024
33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time
Mark 13: 24-32

Jesus said to his disciples: "In those days after that tribulation the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from the sky, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in the clouds' with great power and glory, and 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.

"Learn a lesson from the fig tree. When its branch becomes tender and sprouts leaves, you know that summer is near. In the same way, when you see these things happening, know that he is near, at the gates. Amen, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. "But of that day or hour, no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

Background:

The text for last Sunday brought us to the end of the twelfth chapter of Mark's Gospel. The Gospel warned of false leaders who seek respect and honor at the expense of the poor. Jesus demonstrated God's concern for the lowliest in their society by drawing attention to a widow who gave only two small coins, which was all that she had.

The Sunday lectionary passes over the first 23 verses of the thirteenth chapter of Mark's Gospel to provide the text for the church to reflect on for this Sunday. It may be helpful to be aware of how Mark is unfolding his narrative before reflecting on the text for this week. The thirteenth chapter begins with Jesus predicting the destruction of the temple (Mark 13:1-2). In private he then instructs a few of his disciples that there will be a time when some will see war and destruction (Mark 13:3-8). Jesus forewarns them that they will be persecuted and speaks of "times of tribulation such as has not been since the beginning of creation until now..." (Mark 13:19). Mark thus leads into Jesus' instruction to the disciples that is the Gospel text for this Sunday.

Jesus' admonition here is within a Jewish apocalyptic tradition. This type of literature developed during periods of persecution and crisis. Symbols and timetables are used to describe the ultimate victory of those being persecuted. It was meant to offer hope to those who understand the symbolism, while those who do not understand the symbols perceive the text to be strange and meaningless. Here Jesus tells his disciples that the events that will precede the final days will be marked by cosmic events that will be on the scale of creation itself – they will be unmistakable. He draws on the image of the Son of Man that goes back to the book of Daniel:

“As the visions during the night continued, I saw One like a son of man coming, on the clouds of heaven; When he reached the Ancient One and was presented before him, He received dominion, glory, and kingship; nations and peoples of every language serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not be taken away; his kingship shall not be destroyed (Daniel 7:13-14).

In this text from Daniel, the image of the son of man is a celebrated sign of the new age of glory. It is not seen as an image of destruction and woe.

Jesus then turns from cosmic images to the ordinary fig tree. Fig trees are abundant and figs are a staple fruit of the region. Everyone was familiar with the cycle of the fig tree, from blossoms to ripening of the fruit. Jesus is saying that the signs of the age to come will be just as obvious as the cycles of the fig tree.

Mark describes Jesus making use of familiar images of God, who has power over cosmic forces, and the totally familiar fig, to reassure the disciples and give them hope as he moves toward his passion in the Gospel. For us, we are being prepared to celebrate next Sunday, the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, the last Sunday of the Church year.

Reflection Questions:

1. What are the signs of changes that you are most aware of at this point in your life? Are there some that are welcome? Are there some that arouse a sense of fear or dread?
2. How does the approaching of winter, the resetting of clocks from daylight saving, time, and the other changes taking place in nature affect your lifestyle, your demeanor, and your prayer?
3. What are some things that reinforce your sense of hope and trust? What feeds your fear and doubt? Which source do you turn to more frequently?
4. How do these verses of Mark's Gospel seem appropriate for the church to reflect on this Sunday?
5. You might take some time to sit with Jesus and his disciples and read through this reading slowly. Envision that you are among the followers as the sun begins to set and the heat of the day gives way to the cool night. You are on a hill outside of Jerusalem and slowly the lights of the fires in the city become more visible to you. You and Jesus have been making your way toward Jerusalem for several days and you are aware of the things Jesus had said will happen there. Much has been said and much more has been left unsaid within you and among the disciples. Just as the last bit of the sun sinks below the horizon Jesus breaks the quiet, "In those days after that tribulation the sun will be darkened..." (Read the rest of the Gospel slowly, paying attention to what your spirit does within, and bring it to God as the text unfolds.)
6. Can you take some time talk with God about your relationship with God, and your hopes and fears of what awaits you, and those you love, and the world or all of creation?

The Gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to fr.paul.gallagher.ofm@gmail.com.

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscs-calledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

Excerpts from the Lectionary for Mass for Use in the Dioceses of the United States of America, second typical edition © 2001, 1998, 1997, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, DC. Used with permission. All rights reserved. No portion of this text may be reproduced by any means without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

Please include this information when printing or forwarding.

Excerpts from the readings for November 17, 2024, the Thirty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time

In those days, I Daniel, heard this word of the Lord: "At that time there shall arise Michael, the great prince, guardian of your people; 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. "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake; some shall live forever, others shall be an everlasting horror and disgrace. "But the wise shall shine brightly like the splendor of the firmament, and those who lead the many to justice shall be like the stars forever."

You are my inheritance, O Lord! My allotted portion and my cup, you it is who hold fast my lot. I set the Lord ever before me; with him at my right hand I shall not be disturbed. Therefore my heart is glad and my soul rejoices, my body, too, abides in confidence; because you will not abandon my soul to the netherworld, nor will you suffer your faithful one to undergo corruption. You will show me the path to life,

fullness of joys in your presence, the delights at your right hand forever.

Brothers and sisters: Every priest stands daily at his ministry, offering frequently those same sacrifices that can never take away sins. But this one offered one sacrifice for sins, and took his seat forever at the right hand of God; now he waits until his enemies are made his footstool. For by one offering he has made perfect forever those who are being consecrated. Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer offering for sin.

Jesus told his disciples: "In those days after that tribulation the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give light, and the stars will be falling from the sky, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. "And then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in the clouds' with great power and glory, and 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. "Learn a lesson from the fig tree. When its branch becomes tender and sprouts leaves, you know that summer is near. In the same way, when you see these things happening, know that he is near, at the gates. Amen, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. "But of that day or hour, no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."

Excerpts from Daniel 12:1-3; Psalm 16:5, 8-11; Hebrews 10:11-14, 18; and Mark 13:24-32

Friends,

Here are the gospel background and reflection questions for November 17th, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. In the gospel from Mark, Jesus is near Jerusalem in the days just before his trials and crucifixion, and he has been teaching some close disciples about persecution and tribulation yet to occur. To this he adds, "In those days after that tribulation the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give its light, the stars will be falling from the sky, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in the clouds' with great power and glory. And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the end of the earth." Jesus adds, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. But of that day or hour, no one knows, only the Father."

The other readings have additional references to times of distress, and some receiving eternal life, this made possible by the saving sacrifice that Jesus offered. In the first reading from Daniel, the Lord tells the prophet, "At that time Michael shall arise, the great guardian. It shall be a time unsurpassed in distress since nations began. Your people shall escape, everyone who is found written in the book. Many of those in the dust of the earth shall awake; some shall live forever, others shall be an everlasting horror." Psalm 16 proclaims, "I set the Lord ever before me; with him at my right hand I shall not be disturbed. My heart is glad, my soul rejoices, my body abides in confidence, because you will not abandon my soul; you will show me the path to life." In the second reading, again from the letter to the Hebrews, we hear, "Every priest offers frequently those same sacrifices that can never take away sins. This one offered one sacrifice for sins, and by one offering he made perfect forever those who are being consecrated."

For over a month now, as we have been drawing toward the close of our liturgical year, the second readings have been from the letter to the Hebrews. Most of these have made specific reference to Jesus Christ as High Priest, as does the one for this week. "He who consecrates and those who are being consecrated all have one origin..." "We have a great high priest, Jesus, who is able to sympathize with our weaknesses..." "Every high priest is taken from among men; no one takes this honor upon himself..." "Jesus' priesthood does not pass away. He is always able to save those who approach God through him..." "Christ, offered once to take away the sins of many, will appear a second time..." The sequence closes with this one for this week: "This one (priest) offered one sacrifice for sins, and by one offering he made perfect forever those who are being consecrated."

Joe

> i < May the Word light your way each day!