

November 18, 2018
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 was from the end of the twelfth chapter of Mark's gospel. In that text Jesus warned the crowd regarding false leaders who seek respect and honor. He then called attention to one of the lowliest in their society, a widow, who gave two coins, and he told them that she was worthy of the honor that others were striving after.

The Sunday lectionary skips over the first 23 verses of the thirteenth chapter in providing this Sunday's text. However, it is helpful to at least 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 and conclude that the final time is at hand. (Mark 13:3-8) Jesus forewarns them that they will be persecuted, and he speaks of "... times of tribulation such as has not been since the beginning of creation until now..." (Mark 13:19) This leads into the part of Jesus' instruction to the disciples that is the gospel text for this Sunday.

Jesus' admonition here is within an apocalyptic tradition of the Jews. 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. This type of literature was meant to offer hope to those who understand the symbolism. Those who do not understand the symbols perceive the text to be strange and meaningless. In verses 24 and 25, 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. In verse 26 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. How does the approaching of winter affect your lifestyle, your demeanor, and your prayer?

2. When you think of times of anxious waiting in your life you...
3. When you think of times of hope and expectation in your life you...
4. What feeds your sense of hope and trust? What feeds your fear and doubt? Which source do you turn to more frequently?
5. Why do you think Jesus took up this subject with his followers?
6. Why does the Church have us read these verses of Mark's gospel at a Sunday Liturgy?
7. As I read this gospel text, I think God is inviting me to...
8. Can you take some time to talk with God about your relationship with God, and about your hopes and fears of what awaits you, or those you love, 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 annemarie.lom@gmail.com

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. The homepage is <https://fsc-calledtobe.org/>. The third 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.

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Excerpts from the readings for November 18, 2018, 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