

## Commentary to the Thirty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time

### The Wise Shall Shine Brightly



A little over two weeks ago, people went around trying their best to frighten other people. They were having fun. Horror movies are still popular. People go to them to scream. They are having fun. Why? Perhaps part of the fun that people have on Halloween or at a horror movie is that they like getting scared. Perhaps part of it is knowing that this is all make believe. Today's readings are scary. The trouble is, they are not make believe. Daniel says that a time is coming which will be unsurpassed in distress. Jesus also talks about this time when he says that the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give off light, the stars will fall from the skies and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

These sections of Daniel and of the New Testament are written in the literary genre we call apocalyptic writing. This genre uses poetry and prose, and engages the imagination and emotions. It is meant to scare people into recognizing the horrors of sin and the devastation that sin causes. The end of the world is not make believe, and it will be a scary time. But is it a scary time for everyone? Not according to our readings. Daniel is told that his people, the people who remain faithful to God, shall escape. The wise shall shine brightly and those who lead others to justice shall be like the stars forever. Jesus says that the Son of Man will send out his angels to gather his elect from the end of the earth and the end of the sky. So the question is, "How scared should we be?" The answer is really another question, "How committed to God are we?" If we are committed to the Lord, we have no reason to fear the end of time.

We know this. In fact, every day we pray for the strength to remain committed to God no matter what crisis we face. We do this every time we say the Lord's Prayer. Remember this prayer ends with: "And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil." What we are saying is, "Don't allow us to be tempted to leave you Lord. Protect us from the evil that can destroy us. Help us to be holy, set aside for you." It is not easy to be holy. We live in a society that promotes self-indulgence. Loving God and loving neighbor can't exist in a self-indulgent society. Neither action adequately answers the question, "What's in it for me?" The immoral elements of our society attempt to dupe us into believing that it is normal to put ourselves before others. Sometimes this is obvious. Sometimes this is subtle. For example, many people have followed a path to marriage that they don't realize has been dictated by a self-absorbed society. Although their goal is to make a lasting life together, so many begin with a trial marriage to be sure that they are going to be happy. When it comes time to marry, they have to move from "What can I get from this relationship?" to "What can I give to this relationship?" The immoral element of society has weakened their ability to embrace sacrificial love because that was not the foundation of their relationship. They have been duped. And yet, society, particularly the godless media, presents living together as a step towards marriage when it so often and so sadly is a step towards divorce.

In our modern times, approaching marriage as a sacred union of sacrificial love is counter cultural. A young couple sometimes has to do battle against friends and even relatives. The young couple has to fight to be holy, to be set aside for the Lord. The self-indulgent elements of our society cannot see the value of another person except as a means for one's advancement. People routinely use other people for their own gain. There are so many people in the world who are suffering; yet so many in society can see no profit in reaching out to help them. "What good will it do me if I try to help the poor in the Sudan?" they ask within themselves without daring to voice the question.

The concept of helping others because they bear the image of God carries with it no personal gain, at least not here on earth. It takes tremendous courage to withstand the temptation to care only for oneself. It takes courage to trust God to be with us when we reach out to others. It is counter cultural to truly be charitable. It is also Christian. The work place and the school, high school and college, are places where the godless elements of society encourage people to use others. Be it for career advancement or for better grades, people are prodded into taking advantage of others for their own gain. How many people have befriended another to use his or her ideas either to destroy them or to claim them as their own? How many people seek good grades by using another person's work? That is the way of the godless element of society.

It is the world from which we seek to be delivered. Perhaps others will advance in their careers or in their schools, but the Christian is concerned with advancing in holiness. The Lord knows that we can withstand evil. He gave us free will. We can choose to be separate, to be holy, to be His. He gives us His Grace. He gives us both the desire and the ability to see where He can be found and where His image is absent. We cannot allow the self-indulgence of society to convince us that we have no choice but to join in with the evil. We are not evil. We are good. In fact, all people are good. This is how God created us. He calls us to holiness, He is calling us to be true to ourselves. He is calling us to recognize His goodness in ourselves and in the world and to serve Him in His creation. "And the wise shall shine brightly, like the splendour of the firmament, and those who lead many to justice will be like the stars forever." Leading others to justice means bringing others to a relationship with God. People are longing for meaning, purpose and fulfilment in life. They are longing for God. They need us to give

witness to holiness, to happiness. We can do this. The world needs us to do this. We do not fear the end of time. Nor do we fear the end of our own time, our death. What we do fear is giving in to the world and rejecting God. Now that's scary.

Fr. Joseph Pellegrino, SJ