

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Nov 17th 2013

PRE-PRAYERING

We are in the final days of the liturgical year. Two weeks from today is the First Sunday of Advent, believe it or not. The readings for today's liturgy invite us to reflect on the coming of the "Final Days". We want to be "in that number" when the saints go marching in! We are praying in preparation for hearing these readings by reflecting upon how we get into that "number".

What centers our lives will be the most precious. What is most precious as we near the "final days" of our lives is what centers the life worth everything else. Things which were the center at one time might not be there as we advance in age and wisdom. As we advance towards Advent and the "Coming Days", we are invited to reflect upon what holds us personally together; what takes us into our futures. Those who are "in that number" have been given their tickets for entry through faith and the works of justice.

REFLECTION

Malachi, the Prophet whose name means "My Messenger", has been carrying on a question-and-answer oracle about how God is dealing with Israel now and in the past. The prophet has been revealing that God knows the questions and worries of Israel. They have been wondering about how the wealthy seem to prosper without living the laws and customs of the Jewish tradition. Those who are faithful do not seem to get much of the pie of prosperity. They are grumbling and God speaks through Malachi about those who do not tithe or take care of the orphans and widows within the Jewish community.

What we hear today is God's prediction about what is going to happen to those who will be burned up like stubble and all their possessions as well. Fire is the symbol for God's punishing anger, especially aimed at those who refuse to acknowledge God's holiness expressed in Torah.

We hear also a comforting prophecy that for those who revere God, and in that way "fear" God, a warm sunshine will bathe them with the justice due them for keeping God's law of love. The call of the Promise-maker has to be trusted during the times of not-having so that in the "next-time" there will be an eternal prosperity. Faith then is the ticket.

Yesterday, November 16th, we Jesuits, and many others, recalled and celebrated the five Jesuits, their housekeeper and her young daughter who gave “testimony” in their courtyard. The Jesuit priests had been given the “wisdom in speaking that all your adversaries will be powerless to resist or refute.” Their adversaries were the El Salvadorian government and its military. These five were educators in the Jesuit mission of the Catholic University. The mother and daughter were all aware of their danger. Their wisdom sprang from the Gospel and their love for and commitment to, the poor and powerless of that Central American country.

For their brilliance of mind and dedication of soul, they were dragged out of their beds in the early morning and shot one at a time. The cowardly act was executed out of fear on the part of the government. On the part of the Jesuits, they were executed, because they were companions of Jesus and the apostles who had read the Gospel in its totality of meaning. They had prayed often this passage to which we are invited to listen and with which to be touched. The seven were martyred not merely for the Faith, but for how they had listened to and prayed with such passages. They were executed for their beliefs which moved them to speak the “wisdom” of Jesus which called them to prophesy against the “possessors” and on behalf of the “dispossessed”. Their faith moved them to speak out and live that, “there will arise the sun of justice with its healing rays.”

This entire chapter is about bad times coming . It begins with the picture of the poorest widow putting all her savings in the temple collection basket while the wealthy gave from their surplus. She, by putting her money in the treasury, places her treasure in the good times coming. These few verses set up the discussion about how beautiful, powerful, eternally present, the temple stands. Jesus makes some prophetic and attention-getting statements about the temple and the consequences of putting their little lives into companionship with Jesus. It will cost them plenty to “be in that number”.

Someone once said that if we don’t stand for something, we’ll fall for anything. The Church as a company with Jesus has, is, and will stand with Jesus as he speaks the words of justice. If we do not we will fall for the voices which say, “I am he” and “The time has come.” Jesus invites the disciples not to be deceived by those who urge avoidance of the Cross and those people of the world hanging on it.

Next week we celebrate the feast of Christ the King and the Gospel will offer us Jesus putting his whole life on the line of the Tree. This Sunday we are offered the time and grace to commit ourselves to the Gospel’s invitations to faith in his Kingdom and our working for the Widow’s and Orphans and against the possessors who are oppressors” of such poor. The heavens and earth and all its temples may and will pass away, but for those who accompany Jesus during their days on earth, they will pass along “in that number.”

“To be near God is my happiness, to place my hope in God the Lord.”

Larry Gillick, S.J.