

33rd SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME – C (November 13, 2022)

Well, we made through another election day...and the polls were barely closed before talk turned immediately to the presidential election in 2024. Heaven help us! But we have survived this year's results so far. I say that because if you got caught up in the scare tactics used by both sides, you might have thought the end of the world, or at least the end of our democracy was right around the corner if the 'wrong' person or party was elected.

Of course election results matter, and for a whole variety of reasons. But our readings today remind us of future events and realities that are way more important than who wins or loses in these contests for public office. The prophet Malachi speaks of the day that will come, 'blazing like an oven, when all the proud and all evildoers will be like stubble'. And Jesus in the gospel warns of wars, insurrections, earthquakes, famines and other disasters. And if that wasn't enough, he tells of those who follow him that some will be handed over by their families, they will be hated and some even put to death.

Hardly a rosy scenario! But it does indicate what will happen at the end of time. Last weekend I spoke about how God will raise our bodies from the dead and reunite them with our souls. That will lead in turn to the last judgment that we will all face; again from the Nicene Creed: "He [Jesus] will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead." This is serious stuff, folks—no doubt about it. But Jesus tells us these things not to frighten us; rather, he does so out of his great love for us and his desire to help us live in this life in order to prepare for that time and to grow in our love and trust in him.

And Jesus makes that clear even in this challenging (some may say 'frightening') passage today. Yes, there will be 'wars and insurrections', but 'do not be terrified'. Yes, his disciples may face persecution and other crosses, but 'not a hair of your head will be destroyed.' Is Jesus contradicting himself here? No, he's not. We may and in fact do face suffering and death in this earthly life...just as Jesus did; there's no way around it. But those things cannot destroy us in any final sense because of the power of Jesus' resurrection and his triumph over the lasting power of sin and death.

Parents: how many times when your children were growing up did they come running up to you because they were frightened by loud thunder, or the monster they were sure was in their closet or under their bed? And how many times did you hug them and assure them that there was nothing to be afraid of because you were right there to protect them? Well, we are all children no matter what our age—children of our loving God who assures us over and over again that we have nothing to fear because his power and love and grace will protect and sustain us no matter crosses we have to bear.

What are we afraid of; what frightens us? The wrong political party having power, however we may each define 'wrong'? Are we afraid of financial struggles, or a troubled or broken marriage or family relationship? Are we afraid of illness or weakness, or getting an unexpected diagnosis from the doctor? Are we afraid of death? I'm not suggesting that we make a daily list of all our fears and obsess over them or live under a constant black cloud—that's not healthy, and fear at that level accomplishes nothing whatever that is good.

But I think it's important to be aware of what concerns or frightens us...precisely so that we can then know to bring them to:

- the One who is always assuring us that we have nothing to fear;
- the One who acknowledged his own fear in the garden the night before he died but still trusted fully in his heavenly Father's wisdom and love;
- and the One who conquered the lasting power of fear, sin, and death by his glorious resurrection.

I know this can sound all too easy to say, too much 'pie-in-the-sky' wishful thinking, especially when we are forced to confront trials, sorrow and suffering. And it can be easy in those times to echo Jesus' own words from the Cross: "my God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" and wonder if the atheists were right all along. But let's ask ourselves: do we think we somehow deserve to be free from suffering, that we can excuse ourselves from the Cross? No, we can't; we can claim no such right. Jesus made that clear by his own words and by his own horrifically painful example at Calvary. But the Cross was most certainly not the end of his story, nor will our crosses—no matter what form they take—be the end of ours.

What frightens you? Name it, speak it, acknowledge that 'elephant in the room'...and then bring it to Jesus and be honest with him about your fear. Of course, he knows your fears before you even speak them, but it's important for us to speak and admit them to him so that we can honestly admit our need for his saving grace. And then we can rejoice in his great and loving desire to give us precisely that gift. Again, remember how you reassured your growing children that they had nothing to be afraid of because you were there to protect them. Then allow yourself to hear Jesus say the same thing to you and to give you those same assurances. "Do not be terrified...not a hair on your head will be destroyed". Jesus is true to his promises, and his resurrection from the dead is the rock-solid fulfillment of those promises. We have nothing to fear.