

Sermon Ordinary Sunday 33 Year C 2022

While it's been a bit slow in coming, I think summer is gradually getting here... Though the last few months have been pretty wet, the days are certainly warmer. We are using (hopefully) our heaters less, or not at all. The days are longer. When I leave the vicarage early in the morning to unlock the church for morning prayer and mass it is now bright, which certainly wasn't the case in the middle of winter. And our gardens now are full of growth. Those with lawns know a big part of their time is keeping them under control. I love the changing of seasons: the new plants and flowers we can expect at different times of the year. In spring we are reminded of all the little treasures that have been in hiding for months on end. Some places of course are hot and humid all year round with just the wet and dry season, or the typhoon season and 'the rest of the year'. The aboriginal inhabitants from this part of the world speak of there being something like seven seasons.

As we know, the church has her seasons as well. And as with the natural seasons, over the course of a year in the church's seasons, there are changes and variety as certain things are emphasised and allowed to take prominence. We now come to the close of the great season of Sunday's after Trinity, in some places known as 'ordinary time'. After all these 'green Sundays', 34 weeks of the church's year, we will crown and complete next week with the Feast of Christ the King. A faithful observing of our church's seasons allows us to cover all the highs and lows of our faith. It gives us opportunity to explore the rich themes and nuances of life. It is one of the advantages and benefits of liturgical worship as we observe it. As I was saying last week, we are not limited to a narrow or limited understanding of our lives or our faith. All of our life is brought into the faith of the church catholic. It is the trouble of some of those churches where the themes explored are dependent only on the personal likes of the preacher. It means you might have 30 weeks looking at the book of Romans, but not much else besides... But as we tell our sacred stories, and celebrate our sacred rites and sacraments over the course of a year, we have opportunity for the full range of our human experience - and the full depth of our faith - to be addressed and pondered and celebrated.

But the liturgical year of our Church as we observe it also covers *all times* - past, present, and future. We look to the past in that period from Christmas to Pentecost as we walk with Jesus in His earthly ministry while He was among us. We look to the present, especially in these Sundays after Trinity, when we really explore together how, in the light of the gospels, we ought to live the faith in the ordinariness of our lives. And we look to the future. This is a thread that comes to the fore in Advent as we consider the two-fold coming of Christ: his first at Bethlehem (which tends to get all the attention), but also his second coming in glory at the end of time. Today's readings, then, anticipate that theme of Advent, by directing our attention today to the End of the World or the 'Last Things'. In a way, the church holds off until the last Sunday after Trinity before it serves us with the difficult idea of the Last Things. We cannot pick and choose the content of the faith. So even if wait until the end of the year we still need to look at it. So then, how does the Church want us to think about that event, that moment in time, some point in the future? What's the right attitude to have as we look to that future? How do we make sense of it all?

Well, first of all, we should recognize that *every* age in human history has had its doomsayers proclaiming that the end of the world was near. *Every* age has had its wars, earthquakes, famines, and calamities. There are people around the world who think it can't get much worse than it currently is. Which is really to take a very narrow view of history indeed. The horrors of the 1st and 2nd world wars, the French, Russian, and Chinese cultural revolutions, the plagues of medieval Europe, all made life far more dangerous and miserable than we have ever known. And once the current sabre-rattling over Ukraine is settled, we'll probably find the world actually *hasn't* ended. And there have *always* been preachers who have wanted to whip up anxiety and fear in people. By the time St. Luke wrote his Gospel, *he* had to deal with them. The early Christians to whom he was writing were already being filled with worry by preachers who were telling them that the end of the world was near. St. Paul was dealing with the same situation as reflected in today's passage from his Letter to the Thessalonians. And so do we. There are preachers in our time who spend a lot of time talking about the Last Day, the end of the world, and interpreting certain parts of the Bible to fit their message.

Our Church certainly *does not* ignore the fact that the world will come to an end and that Christ *will* come again in judgment on the Last Day. But our Church asks us not to spend time pondering *exactly* when He is coming again so much as it asks us to place our *ordinary lives* in the context of the fact that *He will* come again. In other words, we might say that we ought to live every day as if it were our last; that we ought to live every day prepared to meet our maker. But perhaps more helpfully, to live our lives in the context of eternity, or the hope of eternity. And it is this hope that will enable us to confront the challenges that will come, as outlined for us in the gospel today. The important thing is, as people of faith, to recognize the certainty of Christ's coming again and to not let our thoughts get all caught up and distracted by the details. We live out our lives confident of our hope and destiny. The rest we leave to the mysterious plan of God.

That's important, because in any human endeavour the goal in front of us determines how we will get there. Knowing where we hope to go means we can work out the steps we need to take. Our own end should give meaning to our lives, should shape our lives. Our own personal end, our own 'last day', our own death, should shape our present. Our end, indeed our Day of Judgement, ought to make us think about what is truly valuable and important. The Thessalonians, to whom Paul addresses, had given up on caring about this life because they were preparing so much for the next. They were setting their sights above, while neglecting the world around them, and thereby missing key opportunities to witness, as Our Lord in the gospel today also directs us to.

The end of the world should be important to us because it makes clear here and now our earthly priorities. If we don't care about our own judgment, and if we don't care about the Final Judgment at the End of the World, then we won't really care about our ordinary everyday lives. If our finality isn't important to us, then ordinary life won't be important to us. It's true that any of us may die tomorrow and have our last day. So, we should live like we're going to live forever, *and* live like we're going to die tomorrow. When we see that our lives play out on the horizon of eternity, then we see that our own lives *today* truly do matter. Amen.