

33rd Sunday of the Year

Year B

The Eternal Protection Of All Whom Christ Is Sanctifying.

We celebrate today the final consummation at the end of time. Each Mass continues Christ's redemptive work in the world and brings us nearer to the final Mass when the work of sanctification will be complete.

(Readings: Daniel 12: 1-13. Hebrews 10: 11-14, 18. Mark 13: 24-32.)

I think most people would agree that we live in an ever-changing world; a world in which old values and past traditions; things that society was once quite comfortable with, seem to be abandoned ever more, and more casually. Commonly, families, in all its forms, break up and disperse. And the sense of community that was once taken for granted is irrevocably changed, sometimes even lost forever.

So, what can we rely on in this changing world? This is what Jesus talks about when he describes a chaotic scene, when the sun and moon give no light, and the very stars fall from the sky. Full of unfamiliar imagery, it is a difficult passage to understand. Even so, we can be sure that Jesus was speaking about dark and difficult days. And in many respects, his description fits, not only the world of today, but also the very Church in which we seek continuity, and comfort, even refuge, from the world's chaos.

Occasional solar eclipses aside, we don't see the sun forever darkened, or the stars breaking free from their orbits. But those references may only be figures of speech, common to that time. They may be compared to some of today's sayings, such as, 'The world is falling apart,' or, 'My dreams have turned to ashes'. Clearly, we don't mean these literally. And yet, it can so often feel that way. What we mean is that things have gone terribly wrong for us.

We live in a world that is in a state of constant change, where nothing seems stable for very long. In fact, there are times when it seems that we cannot really rely on anything, or on anyone. A child learns to depend on her home. Then her parents' divorce, and her whole world is shaken. A man learns to depend on his job. Then he finds he has been made redundant. And his world is shaken. A woman learns to depend on her husband. Then, in mid-life, he walks out on her. And her whole world is shaken. We become very comfortable, and contented in our nice, 'safe' communities. Then a criminal element moves into the area. Violence escalates, property values fall, and our world is shaken.

When people are gripped by such painful, traumatic experiences, it can, all too easily, feel as though the sun has truly gone out, that the stars have fallen with a devastating, earth rending crash.

We may not fully understand the details of this morning's reading, but, in one sense, that doesn't actually matter. Our challenge is how to lead stable Christian lives in the midst of change; how to be unshaken when all around us is shaking apart.

One thing that could help is for us to realise that change is not always a bad thing, and that God does bring out the good when our world is shaken. That is easier for us to understand when we look back in history making it possible for us to see things in hindsight.

For example, take the late 18th Century French Revolution. They were truly terrible and frightening times. Thousands of people were beheaded, including the king and queen. But in the next century, Thomas Carlyle said that had it not been for the Revolution, he would not know what to think about God. That old system of cruel royalty and feudal lords had to go. It had to be replaced by something better. And there have been many other revolutions, in many other societies.

The great, 19th Century, American opponent of slavery, Ralph Waldo Emerson, was once attending a religious convention in New Orleans. The meetings were held in a 2nd floor hall. The windows looked out onto a dock where a slave auction was taking place. He said, ‘With one ear, I could hear the preaching of the Good News of Jesus. With the other, I could hear an auctioneer selling a twelve-year-old boy, without his mother, for fifteen dollars.’ A few short years later, slavery was abolished. It, likewise, had to die, even though its death was so terribly painful and violent.

Whereas for many years the ‘blacks’ as they were called, remained second class citizens in America, we thank God that gradually the gap between black and white lessened. And though the world still has some way to go in all of that, God is bringing good out of evil.

Something that can help in our shaken traumas, is for us to focus on something that cannot be shaken. For, not everything in this world is crumbling. Some things remain steady and firm, year in, year out, century after century. Jesus called our attention to one of these things when he said, ‘Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.’ That was, indeed, a bold claim, a claim that history has proven to be so very true.

We can ask ourselves, “Has anything happened to the essential teaching and character of Jesus? Can the one Holy, Divinely Catholic, and Apostolic truth of God, ever really be altered?”

Always, and everywhere, God towers over anything we know, as our model and inspiration. Take his Golden Rule, ‘Do unto others as you would have them do to you.’ That has not been shaken.

The great commandment, ‘Love God above all things, and your neighbour as yourself.’ That has not been shaken. Nor has his standard of greatness. ‘Whoever would be great among you must be the servant of all.’ That remains true.

These words, and all the others spoken by Jesus, will always hold firm, even though the sun goes out and the stars fall from the sky. And in a changing world where so many things have been shaken, Jesus remains our anchor, and our hope, and our inspiration.

We may be unhappy with many things around us. But we mustn’t fear, or be discouraged, because we believe that whatever happens, God will never abandon us, neither his Church, nor his world. He will be there to make sure that good will always overcome evil.

“Remember, I am with you always, even to the end of the world.”