

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time- C Cycle

November 7, 2010

INTRODUCTION: (2 Maccabees 7,1-2.9-14; 2 Thess. 2,16-3,5; Luke 20,27-38)

Alexander the Great conquered every nation from Sicily and Egypt all the way to India. This area included Israel. He did it all in twelve years. In his spare time, when he wasn't busy conquering, he founded 70 cities. Alexander died at the age of 32 in 323 BC! At his death, his empire was divided among three of his generals. Our first reading today takes us about 150 years later to 175 BC when an ambitious Greek ruler named Antiochus IV came to power. He decided to unite his kingdom through religious unity. Thus it became a crime for the Jews to practice their Jewish religion. Circumcision was forbidden. Copies of the Scriptures were burned. Jews could not follow their dietary laws or celebrate their usual feasts. The worship of Greek gods and goddesses was required. Some of the Jews gave in to the Greeks, while others fought hard to hold on to their traditional faith. Our first reading gives us just a hint of how terrible this time was for the Jews who were faithful. If you look for this passage in your bible at home, it describes the torture of seven brothers and their heroic mother. A shorter portion of this reading was chosen today because it reflects the Jewish faith 175 years before Christ in the resurrection of all who are faithful to Yahweh. The passage prepares us also for the gospel, which deals with a question the Sadducees challenged Jesus with about the resurrection, something they did not believe in.

HOMILY

A man left his home in Chicago one cold November day to go to Cancun on vacation. His wife was supposed to meet him there a day later. When he got there he sent an email to his wife - only he mis-typed the email address. His email went to a recent widow who had just buried her husband. When she opened her emails she gasped and fainted. Her daughter, who happened to be home at the time, heard her fall and went to see what happened. She found this note on the computer screen, "My dearest, I just checked in. I can hardly wait to see you when you get here tomorrow. Your loving husband. P.S. It sure is hot down here." (from *Laughter, the Best Medicine*, Reader's Digest, pg 300)

The Sadducees were an extreme conservative group among the Jews. They believed only the first five books of the Bible were the inspired word of God (not the prophets, psalms, historical books or wisdom literature). They did not believe in spirits, nor in angels. In spite of the general belief among the Jews that the dead would rise on the last day, as attested to in our first reading, the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection. Someone humorously said that's how they got their name (Sad -you-see) because they didn't believe in the resurrection. The Sadducees represented the priestly aristocracy, so they were to be found mostly in Jerusalem, in the vicinity of the Temple. Jesus had, by this time, cleansed the Temple and driven the money-changers out, so it is possible that the cleansing of the Temple gave rise to this confrontation between Jesus and the Sadducees.

Since they didn't believe in the resurrection, they presented Jesus with a problem they thought would prove there could be no resurrection. They had a rule about a man marrying his brother's

widow and producing children in his brother's name if the brother had died without children. This preserved the name and memory of the brother, it kept in the family whatever property the brother had, and it ensured that the widow would be provided for. Jesus answered the Sadducees by telling them they misunderstood marriage and they misunderstood the resurrection. Jesus is saying human language cannot describe the nature of the risen body when he says those who have risen will be like angels. In other words, resurrection will be nothing like the life we live now. Writers have tried to explain it and it seems to be best explained by what it is not: no pain, no suffering, no boredom, no death, no need for the things we now need to survive (food and rest) and no need to enter into marriages in order to keep our species from dying out. Probably the closest thing to heaven and the risen life that I can think of are those fleeting moments when we experience the love of another or the love of God. But it will be an experience that will be infinitely more profound than anything we now know and it will be forever. St. Paul, in Corinthians, compares the resurrection to a seed that grows into something wonderful and which no longer resembles the seed that had been planted. That is his way of explaining what is unexplainable.

At this time of the year, as nature begins to shut down for a few months, the Church is reminding us of the temporary nature of all things and of our own mortality. But in today's gospel it also reminds us of the hope we have, that God is not only the God of the living, but also the God who continues to create. Through his Son he is creating a new world, he is calling us to a new life. This new life is not just something we can expect to get automatically, which our present day culture tries to lead us to believe. It is a kingdom we are all invited into, but whether we enter depends on our free choice as to whether we follow the way Christ has shown us. Jesus has made that very clear: "I am the way..." he told us. He is the unique Son of God, the very presence of God with us. Anything less is not the gospel, and assent to anything less will not make us disciples. It is not just an intellectual assent Jesus is asking of us; it involves being willing to hear Jesus' proclamation of God's will and doing it. (cf: A Coming Christ in Advent, Raymond E. Brown, pg 65 & 66). Amen

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time- C Cycle

November 14, 2010

INTRODUCTION: (Malachi 3, 19-20a; 2 Thess. 3, 7-12; Luke 21, 5-19)

In our first reading today we hear from the prophet Malachi who lived about 470 years before Christ. Many Jews at that time were apathetic about their religious duties and about keeping the Commandments. He warns his listeners that the day of reward and punishment is coming. Fire is the symbol that represents both the reward and the punishment. It will be scorching heat for those who have not followed God's ways and will bring warmth and healing to those who have been faithful.

HOMILY: An atheist was driving in the country when he came upon a priest and a rabbi

standing on the shoulder of the road, fishing. Next to them was a big sign that read "Turn around. The end is near." The atheist took offense at the sign, so he rolled down the window and shouted: "Don't preach to me, you religious nuts!" A few seconds later the priest and rabbi heard tires screech, then a splash. The rabbi turned to the priest and said, "I told you we should've just written, 'Bridge Out Ahead.'" (from *Laughter, the Best Medicine*, Reader's Digest, pg 296)

A theme central to Jesus' teaching is the kingdom of God. For six centuries the Jews had suffered under one kingdom after another: the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks and the Romans. God had made many promises in the past assuring them that they were special to him and that they would be blessed in many ways because of his unique love. Even six hundred years of foreign rule did not dampen their hopes that God would liberate them from their enemies and from all their suffering.

When John the Baptist came on the scene, he told people to turn around (repent). The end is near. God would soon send his people a savior who would initiate God's kingdom. In preparation for this, John stressed the punishment that would be inflicted on sinners; Jesus, like John, proclaimed the kingdom was very near and sinners must change their ways. But, unlike John, Jesus put more stress on the joy of salvation. Jesus taught about the kingdom in parables; he cast out demons to show he was overthrowing the powers of evil; he healed people showing that indeed the kingdom was very soon to arrive.

As Jesus proclaimed the kingdom, a question that came up frequently was "when is this going to happen?" Jesus made it very clear that no one can predict when it would happen. Yet, in every age Christians have come up with predictions that pinpoint the exact time. Some of us might remember a recent book by Hal Lindsay: *The Late Great Planet Earth*. Every one of these predictions have one thing in common: they've all been mistaken. We hear in today's second reading that many of the Thessalonians expected Jesus to return almost immediately, so they gave up their jobs and sort of waited around for him. Paul told them to get back to work. If they didn't work, they should not eat; that is, they couldn't free load off the community. Jesus also said no one knows where it will be, for the kingdom is not a location that can be situated by longitude and latitude, but the kingdom of God will be obvious to all when it is established: "When the Son of Man comes...it will be as evident as the lightning that flashes across the sky." (Luke 17,24) There is one thing Jesus did say most definitely, we must be prepared for it could come upon us very suddenly. Remember the parable of the man who went away for a while and put his servant in charge of the household. The master expected his servant to go a good job while he was gone. (Lk. 12, 35-48) Being prepared means being ready to meet our maker at any time.

As much as Jesus proclaimed the joy of salvation, he was also a realist. Overcoming the powers of evil would be cataclysmic. Speaking as a prophet, we hear Jesus in today's gospel foretell the pains that would precede the birth of the kingdom. A discussion about the beautiful Temple leads into Jesus' prophetic words. The Temple would be destroyed and catastrophic events such as wars and natural disasters will come and go, but the end is not yet. First the

disciples would suffer for being Jesus' disciples, just as Jesus would have to suffer. The powers of evil will not give up without a fight; the powers of evil will not frustrate God's plan of salvation. For those faithful to God, not a hair on their head would be destroyed.

Until Jesus comes again, we prepare for that day by gathering together in faith, by listening to his words, and by being nourished by his own body and blood. Sometimes life is a joy; sometimes it is a great struggle. In the process, God is making something new as the Book of Revelation tells us. In the end, for those who have been faithful to God, evil, sickness and death will not have its way with us; we shall rejoice in God's peace and love forever. Amen.

Christ the King- C Cycle

November 21, 2010

INTRODUCTION (2 Samuel 5,1-3; Colossians 1,12-20; Luke 23,35-43) When the first king of Israel, King Saul, was killed in battle, the southern part of Israel (the tribes of Judah) chose David as their king. The northern part chose Ishbaal, King Saul's son, to be their king. Ishbaal was inept and after seven years of chaos, the northern tribes turned to David and asked him to rule them also. This is where our first reading comes in. David was a brilliant and far-sighted military and political leader. David was able to conquer his enemies on all sides. In spite of his serious moral misadventures, for which he repented, the Jews always hoped for another king with his talents and capabilities. Kings were anointed when they assumed office, thus the king was called "the anointed one." The Hebrew word for this is "Mashiah," or as we say it: "Messiah." As time went on, especially after the kingdom was destroyed by the Babylonians, the Jews longed for a king, a descendant of David, an anointed one, who would again rule in Israel and who would establish the peaceful and bountiful reign of God. When Mashiah is translated into Greek we have "???????" So when we call Jesus "Christ" we are in effect saying Jesus, the anointed one; i.e., the King. Christ's kingdom is not an earthly one, as St. Paul tells us, but it is eternal and a sharing in God's own authority, power and glory.

HOMILY

After the evening meal, with father, mother and little five-year old Brian, mother left the family rather quickly. Brian wanted to know where his mother was going. Dad said, "Mommy is going to a Tupperware party." He thought for a moment, then asked, "What's a Tupperware party?" Dad always tended to give simple, honest answers so he said, "Well, Brian, a Tupperware party is where a bunch of ladies sit around and sell plastic bowls to each other." Brian nodded as if he understood, then burst out laughing and asked, "Come on, Dad, what is it really?" (from *Laughter, the Best Medicine*, Reader's Digest, pg71)

Brian could not picture a lot of ladies sitting around selling bowls to one another. The Jews, by and large, couldn't picture Jesus as their Messiah and King and they didn't think it was funny when the Apostles preached that he was. The Jews thought they knew what the Messiah was

supposed to be: a glorious military and political leader, an idealized kind of King David who would overcome all their enemies, restore the kingship to Israel and initiate a reign of peace and prosperity. They also knew their Scriptures for they listened to them every week and they knew Deuteronomy 21,23 which said, "God's curse rests on him who hangs on a tree." They could not conceive of Jesus, a convicted criminal, crucified and hanging on a cross, as their Messiah. Pilate might have thought it some kind of a twisted joke that would embarrass the Jewish people to put a sign above Jesus' head, which said he was the King of the Jews. But, by and large, especially among the Jewish leaders, the idea of Jesus as Messiah was not only offensive, but blasphemous, and they were ready to punish anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was their Messiah, their king.

Jesus tried to tell them that his kingdom would be different from any kingdom they had ever known: "My kingdom is not of this world." Perhaps some of them could see how different his kingdom would be when they challenged him to save himself and he didn't. They knew of his amazing powers, but he chose not to use them to save himself. Instead he was willing to suffer extraordinary pain and humiliation to save us.

Think for a moment how great a faith the "good thief" had to be able to have to recognize Jesus as a king: "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Nowhere in any of the literature of that time do we find anyone who anticipated their Messiah would have to suffer. Their Messiah would be a glorious, powerful figure. The "good thief" had to be able to see through all the expectations of the Jewish people; he had to be able to see through the weakness and failure that he was able to observe in Jesus and to affirm that Jesus was indeed a king. It is an act of faith that each of us must make individually if he is to be our king, and if we wish to be with him in his kingdom, a kingdom that will be for each of us the fullness of life that he came to bring us.

It is interesting that it was only 85 years ago that the Church established this feast of Our Lord, Jesus Christ the King. It was instituted as a corrective to the secular atmosphere of the times. However, as we can see in today's second reading, honoring Jesus as king has been part of the tradition of the Church from the beginning. This passage is "one of the most important theological statements about the person of Christ in the New Testament." (The Collegeville Bible Commentary, pg 1182) It proclaims that Christ existed before all creation and is preeminent among all creatures and that all things were created through his mediation. Therefore, he existed before all creation and is preeminent among all creatures. One verse is especially appropriate for this week of Thanksgiving as we read: "Let us give thanks to the Father, who has made you fit to share in the inheritance of the holy ones in light. He delivered us from the power of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of his beloved Son." "Let us give thanks," the letter to the Colossians says, it doesn't suggest we just say thanks. Giving thanks involves more than just saying it.

That brings us to why we are here today, to give thanks for God's many blessings, especially for bringing us into the kingdom of his beloved Son. Being part of his kingdom is an honor and a privilege that, although we do not appreciate it as much as we should now, we will praise God

for all of eternity, and we will never grow tired of doing so. So let us give thanks to the Lord our God. Amen.

1st Sunday of Advent - A Cycle

November 28, 2010

INTRODUCTION (Isaiah 2,1-5; Romans 13,11-14; Matthew 24,37-44)

The prophet we hear in today's first reading lived over 700 years before Christ. Most probably he had witnessed the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel by the Assyrians, fierce warriors who came from what is modern day Iraq. The southern kingdom of Israel, centered in Jerusalem, lived in fear and trembling that the same fate awaited them. In spite of great turmoil, his message is a message of peace, a peace we continue to yearn for. It is a peace, however, that flows only from walking in God's ways.

HOMILY

A lady, raised as a vegetarian, hardly ever saw a piece of meat growing up. When she married a man who loved meat, they had meat all the time. One Thanksgiving while they and their children were having dinner, the husband announced to the children: "Your mother didn't know what a turkey was until she met me." (Readers Digest, Dec, 2010/Jan. 2011, pg 151) I hope everyone had a nice Thanksgiving.

Today we begin a new Church year with the first Sunday of Advent. I want to tell you about a Scotsman who was calling his dentist to ask about the price of a tooth extraction. Scotsmen are famous for being exceedingly thrifty. The dentist told him it would cost \$85. "\$85!!! Huv ye no'got anythin' cheaper?" "That's the normal charge," said the dentist. "Whit about if ye didnae use any anesthetic?" "That's unusual, sir, but I could do it and knock \$15 off." "Whit about if ye used one of your dentist trainees and still without an anesthetic?" "I can't guarantee their professionalism and it'll be painful. But the price could drop to \$40." "How about if ye make it a trainin' session, ave yer student do the extraction with the other students watchin' an learnin'?" "It'll be good for the students," mull'd the dentist, "and it's going to be very traumatic, but I'll charge you \$5." "Ah, now yer talkin' laddie! It's a deal," said the Scotsman. "Can ye confirm an appointment for the wife next Tuesday?" (from an email)

It's normal for people to want to know how much something costs, even how much it will cost us to get into heaven or how much we need to pray for someone who has died to help them get into heaven. That was one of the questions that kept coming up in high school religion class: how far can we go and still stay in the state of grace; how late can we be for Mass or how early can we leave after Communion and still fulfill our obligation. For some of us older folks, if we ate a little meat on Friday, how much is too much. We tend to ask what's the least amount it will cost us - the least amount of sacrifice we have to make to be able to get to heaven; to go "rejoicing to the house of the Lord."

Another manifestation of this kind of thinking is when we wonder when do we need to be ready to meet the Lord. If we're living a life without God, we try to calculate how long we might have before we could die and not be reconciled with God. Some people might be guilty of the sin of presumption, thinking there will be no consequences for ignoring God's law because God is all good so we don't have to worry about being ready. As we all get ready to celebrate the birth of our Savior, today's scriptures tell us we need to do more. We need to get ready for the day he will come again, not as a baby but as our glorified, risen Lord. Paul says, that day is closer than when we first believed. Jesus tells us that day will catch us off guard if we're not ready; it will hit us like a flood, like a thief when we're asleep, in the middle of the day while we're at work or fixing dinner.

Advent means "coming" and although we are touched by the humble coming of our God as an infant us to save us, it's also the coming of an adult Christ that we must be thinking of. Will he be a stranger to us and will we be a stranger to him? There's one sure way we will not meet as strangers, and that is to pray. We'll never have a relationship with God (or for that matter with anyone else) unless we put time aside to nurture that relationship. If we want to know what is the minimum amount of time we can get by with, it's not going to amount to much of a relationship. The second thing it will cost us if we want to go rejoicing to the house of the Lord is to "conduct ourselves properly;" i.e., as he has taught us. Paul gives us a few examples of improper behavior which he describes as making "provision for the desires of the flesh." Obviously Paul is talking about the desires and cravings of the flesh that are forbidden. A third thing it will cost us to stay on the good side of our creator is to do good works, to love our neighbor as ourselves.

As I conclude, I want to leave you with one thought for this week: come to one of our holy hours this week on Wednesday morning or Friday afternoon. Both of them will be dedicated to prayer for the unborn as our Holy Father and bishops have requested we do. One of the ways we can change the world is through prayer. It is only appropriate that as we prepare to celebrate the birth of a child who came to save us, we pray for those many others who are soon to be born that they be loved and cherished and not be robbed of life and be thrown into a recycle bin.

If you have some other priority to help you be ready to meet the Lord, then that's what needs attention. Paul tells us if we want to go rejoicing to the house of the Lord, it is now the hour to wake from sleep. Amen.