

**All Saints – B Cycle**  
**November 1, 2013**

**INTRODUCTION:** *Rev. 7,2-4.9-14; I John 3,1-3; Mt. 5,1-12a*

In its four and a half billion years, our planet has seen an overwhelming number of catastrophes, earthquakes, volcanoes, hurricanes, collisions with meteors, ice ages, plagues, etc. Somehow, under God's creative hand, planet earth continues to survive while life on this earth not only survives but thrives greatly. We not only have natural catastrophes to be concerned about, but we humans, through our brilliance, have discovered ways to annihilate all of creation if we are not wise and prudent. Will our planet, and life on this planet, continue to survive the many disasters that could come our way, forever? The Book of Revelation, right before the passage we will hear today, is a description of the end of the world and it asks a critical question: "who can survive?"

The answer to that question is not all doom and gloom but a message of hope. The answer is described in today's first reading: Those who have followed Christ faithfully will survive. They will be identified and marked as faithful followers of Christ. As such they will receive his special protection during that time when the end of the world is to come. The first group of those who are to be marked and saved from the ordeal that is to come are from among the Jews: 144,000. It is a symbolic number representing completeness – 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes. The following vision is a vision of all of Christ's followers, a number that was impossible to count because there were so many. Along with the Jews who came to believe in Christ, they will share in Christ's victory over death and enjoy the blessing of eternal happiness forever.

**HOMILY:** From the earliest days of the Church, believers always had deep respect for those who willingly gave their lives for Christ. And many did. They were called martyrs, a word that means witnesses, for when the Roman emperors started persecuting Christians and tried to get them to give up their faith, the martyrs witnessed to Jesus by choosing to die rather than turning away from Jesus. The first martyr was St. Steven. Most of the apostles were martyred. Three hundred years after Jesus ascended, the Holy Father established a feast for all the martyrs, to be celebrated every year, so we don't forget the heroism of these holy men and women. Two centuries later there were too many martyrs as well as too many holy men and women whom the Church wanted to honor that there were not enough days in the year to honor each one individually. So the Holy Father made that feast a feast for all saints, men and women whose lives were examples of holiness for all of us, whether they were martyrs or not.

Three months ago, before my knee operation, my friend and classmate, Fr. Jerry Bensman went on vacation. It was an interesting vacation in that we visited places neither of us had ever seen, Yellowstone National Park with all its geysers and buffalo and elk in Wyoming. We drove on to the majestic high mountains of the Grand Tetons, then on to Salt Lake City and ultimately to Aspen and then to Denver, Colorado. Often I wondered how we would have found all these places without maps and GPS. There were various roads we could have taken, but without the map showing us the right roads, we would never have gotten where we wanted to go. I think of the saints

somewhat that way. Through their holy lives, they have shown us the way to serve God and to be with God forever. Their lives were different in many ways, some lived for a long time, some died young, some lived active lives, some lived quiet lives of prayer, some were brilliant, some were just average, some were married and had children, some lived a single life, some were great sinners, some lived devout lives most of their lives. But like the many roads that would take us where we wanted to go on vacation, the lives of the saints may have followed different routes - some such as dedicating their life to prayer, some by dedicating their life to helping the poor or the sick, some by dedicating their life to teaching, etc., but they all led to the same place: loving God and loving others.

Their lives give us an example of how to live, and we need that example for without it we may be trying to make a long trip without a map. Where they have gone, we hope to be with them some day, with God and with each other in God's kingdom. Someday, hopefully, we will be part of that countless group of people in heaven, for being a saint is the vocation each of us has. Amen.

### **31<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time– C Cycle November 3, 2013**

**HOMILY:** A young family went to a nice restaurant for dinner one evening. One of the little boys in the family happened to find a bright shiny dime and was fascinated by it. He put it in his mouth and started to choke on it. The parents became frantic and started calling for anyone to help their choking son. A man at a nearby table came over, turned the boy upside down, gave him a few swats and the dime came out. The parents were so grateful and asked the man "are you a doctor or a medical practitioner?" No the man said, I work for the IRS.

Diocesan policy requires pastors to present the parish finance report to the parish at or near the end of the fiscal year. Well the fiscal year ended on June 30, but with my vacation and knee replacement and other events, this turned out to be the most convenient Sunday for me to present it to you. I always like to choose a Sunday where the readings have something to do with money so my homily doesn't stray too far from the theme of the gospel. Today's gospel has a lot to do with money. Last week we heard about two people who went up to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee and one was a Publican. You might recall, I described the publican as a public employee who was basically a tax collector. He collected taxes from his fellow Jews to give to the Romans who ruled over the entire Middle East. Also I explained that when tax collectors collected taxes, they always included something for themselves (determined at their discretion) which provided the tax collector and his family a means of support. Some were very generous toward themselves when they added on the additional tax. Rome didn't care how much they added on as long as Rome got the amount they thought should come to them. Today we hear about a chief tax collector who made quite a comfortable living at his job. But when he met Jesus, his life changed as it has changed for so many. Honesty and concern for the poor and needy replaced cheating

and greed as the dominant driving force in his life. That day salvation came to his house.

When I look at our own finance statement, I have to look at it with a considerable amount of appreciation for what our parishioners do for St. Boniface Church. A couple of years ago we had a drive to increase offerings and it was very successful. It seems to me that this past fiscal year people have continued to donate the amount they had originally pledged. We did end fiscal year 2012-2013 in the red, having \$6100 more in expenses than we had in income, but considering that we had large expenses for renovating the Church, we did quite well. And none of the expenses we had for our renovation had to be paid for out of our savings. That figure of \$6100 represents less than 1% of the entire budget. All this says I am grateful we did so well.

Remember, however, that these are figures from last June. Some of you may have noticed that our Sunday collections recently have been quite a bit less than what we need to meet our expenses. I know that some people are having a difficult time financially. I know that our Sunday attendance has been going down and our population is getting older. This year in October our count was just under 400 people coming weekly to Sunday Mass. That is a drop of 8% from last year. Some people have suggested that we lost people during the renovation while the scaffolds were up, or the floor was torn up, or whatever and they never came back afterwards. But all is not lost. New condos and homes are being built in the neighborhood and, hopefully, some percent of those homes will be occupied by Church-going Catholics who have not yet discovered where we are. I hope they discover us soon because at the rate we are going, we are going to end the fiscal year \$30,000 in the red. That is not so good.

We have to do something or in a few years we will go broke. I am suggesting that everyone increase their weekly donation by about \$3 or \$4 dollars a week. I suspect you will never miss it and I'm sure it will come back to you in some form or another. The Lord is not going to let any of us outdo him in generosity. I've always experienced that. If you can do better, it will be very helpful, because not everyone will be able to make an increase of any kind. I want to end on two positive thoughts, the renovation for the church has been paid for and the church should remain in good condition for quite a few years now (barring any unforeseen catastrophe). Secondly, when we have our big celebration of our anniversary in the spring, that celebration has been paid for by a generous donor. The cost for the celebration is not coming from your Sunday contribution.

I am well aware that most of the people who come to St. Boniface are folks who live outside of Northside. I am also aware that many of our parishioners are very generous. I am often amazed at how generous some people are. I just want to thank you for coming to St. Boniface and thank you for helping to keep us in the business of serving God and serving God's people. Amen.

**32<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time– C Cycle**  
**November 10, 2013**

**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, who with their successors, ruled for about 250 years until the Romans gained power in the first century. Our first reading today takes us about 150 years after Alexander to 175 BC when an ambitious Greek ruler named Antiochus IV came to power. He decided to create religious unity throughout his kingdom. He thus made it 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 that many Jews at that time, 175 years before Christ, believed that all who were faithful to Yahweh in this life would rise to new life in the resurrection on the last day. The passage prepares us for the gospel where the Sadducees challenged Jesus about the resurrection, which was something they did not believe in.

**HOMILY**

We need to know a little something about the religious politics of Judaism at the time of Jesus in order to make sense of today's gospel. The Sadducees, who feature in today's gospel, were the archconservatives in Jesus' time. They were connected with the aristocracy and the Jewish priesthood. They did not accept any part of the Bible except the first five books. And they did not believe in angels, spirits and the resurrection of the dead on the last day. What they are trying to do in today's gospel is to prove, with an extreme example, that there can be no resurrection. Their example is based on a law that comes out of the Book of Leviticus (the 3<sup>rd</sup> book of the Bible which was one they accepted). The law is known as levirate marriage and it stated: if a man died and he had no children, then his brother was supposed to marry the man's widow and through her bring children into the world. Adding another wife to the family would have required quite an adjustment, but it solved some serious problems – such as seeking to preserve the name and memory of the brother who died, keeping in the family whatever property the brother had, and ensuring that the widow would be provided for. The Sadducees really didn't believe there was life after this life, but even if there were, in their minds it would be very similar to life the way we know it now. Jesus tells them that's where they went wrong in their thinking. Jesus said it would be entirely different. We will not die, we will be like angels, we will be children of God and we will rise. This gives us a lot to speculate about (especially what being like angels means), but exactly what any of this means is still a mystery. It will always remain a mystery because we have nothing in this world to use as a comparison for what is to come. I do find it interesting however to

read about people who have had near death experiences. It helps one's imagination to visualize the next world just a little better than having nothing at all to help us picture what it might be like.

Sometimes today's gospel causes people to be distressed because they think that once they pass into the next life they lose touch with those they have loved in this life. I think we will still be in touch with those we have been close to in this life. Why should we be separated from those who have supported us and helped us to attain eternal life? One of the common experiences those who have been clinically dead and who have returned to this life report is that most often the first persons they meet in the next life are parents, grandparents, relatives and friends.

Perhaps the most important message the gospel gives us today is to assure us that God has created us for eternal life, a life much more wonderful than anything we can imagine. Remember St. Paul's statement: "eye has not seen nor ear heard nor has it entered into our hearts what things God has prepared for those who love him." So in bad times, we must remember there are better times ahead. In good times, we cannot forget about the even greater happiness God has prepared for those who love him and are faithful to him.

### **33<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time– C Cycle November 17, 2013**

**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. He uses fire as a symbol to represent 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:** A priest, who had just arrived in heaven, was being taken to his eternal dwelling. It was only a small shack and the priest couldn't hide his disappointment. Down the street he saw a taxi driver being shown a lovely estate with gardens and pools. "I don't understand it," the priest said. "My whole life, I served God with everything I had and this is all I get, while this cabbie is given a mansion?" "It's quite simple," St. Peter said. "When you preached, people slept; when he drove, people prayed." (*from Laughter, the Best Medicine, Reader's Digest, pg 342*)

We'll try not to let that happen today. One commentator, Fr. Joseph Fitzmeyer, a Scripture scholar at the Catholic University of America, wrote that this section of the gospel is one of the most difficult parts of the gospel...to interpret." "There are as many interpretations of it as there are heads that think about it." (*the Anchor Bible, the Gospel According to Luke, pg. 1323*) Fr. Fitzmeyer, in this statement, is referring to practically the whole of chapter 21, verses 5 to 38. That whole section of Luke is often called

Jesus' "eschatological discourse" because it deals with the *eschata*, a Greek word that means "last things." It deals with the end of the Jewish Temple, the end of Jerusalem and the end of the world. In the Jewish mind, all of these things were lumped together. For a Jew, how could he or she conceive of a world without the Temple? In the Jewish mind, the end of the Temple would have meant the end of sacrifice, and surely sacrifice would end only with the world itself. (*Bruce Vawter, the Four Gospels, pg 323*) Today's gospel is the first part of this larger section in Luke. As I just said, the "eschatological discourse" is 33 verses long. The passage you just heard me read is 14 verses long. If you want to read the whole section, you will have to get your bibles out when you get home and look up chapter 21 in Luke.

I have a couple of points I want to make regarding this passage regarding the end of the Temple and the end of Jerusalem. St. Luke seems to separate what Jesus said about the destruction of the Temple and the destruction of Jerusalem from the end of the world and the second coming of Christ because when Luke wrote his gospel, the Temple and Jerusalem had already been destroyed. The Romans burnt the city in late August, early September of the year 70 AD and Luke wrote his gospel about 10 or 15 years later.

One interesting fact that I learned in preparing my homily concerns Jesus' warnings not to be misled by people claiming to be the Messiah or claiming to speak in his name. Jesus said do not follow them. In hindsight, we see his warning was very practical. Josephus, the famous Jewish historian, tells us that on the day the Temple was burnt, 6000 people died in the Temple area. They were there because a false prophet announced that God commanded the people to go to the Temple in order to be saved, so 6000 went and perished. Our world is full of false prophets today. We have to be careful that the prophetic voice we follow comes from someone who truly speaks for God.

There are two other points we might remember from today's gospel. In spite of the persecutions Jesus predicted, he predicts victory for those who remained faithful to him. Even in the face of persecution, Jesus could say: "not a hair of your head will be lost. It is by your endurance that you will make your lives secure." It is an assurance of real life, life eternal, for those who remain faithful to Jesus.

Another point is that as we come to the end of the Church year, which will be in two weeks, and as we come to the end of the calendar year in six and a half weeks, we are reminded that all things will eventually come to an end: our life in the present world and eventually all of this material world. One thing only will last, our life with God, a life that begins now in this life and which is nourished through the sacraments, prayer and good works. The most important thing we can do in this life is to never lose the divine life Jesus has offered to share with us. Amen.

**1st Sunday of Advent - A Cycle**  
**November 30/December 1, 2013**

**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 we find only when we walk in God's ways.

**HOMILY:** A little boy was asked in Sunday school what he was going to give his little sister for Christmas. He said "I don't know." The teacher asked, "well, what did you give her last year?" The little boy said "chicken pox." Let's hope this Christmas he comes up with something nicer! *The Joyful Noiseletter, Dec. 2011.*

I do not get to plays or musicals very often, but a week ago went with a few friends to see *Fiddler on the Roof*. One of the memorable songs in it is "Sunrise, Sunset." The Jewish father was marrying off his eldest daughter, and he couldn't understand where the time went. In his mind she was still his little girl playing with her friends. I can't repeat all the words of the song, but this line I do remember, and it is appropriate for today, the first Sunday of Advent: "Sunrise, sunset, sunrise, sunset, swiftly flow the years, one season following the other, laden with happiness and tears." Today we begin a new Church year and in a month we begin a new calendar year. Where does the time go? We do not like to think about this, but for all of us the day will come when we will have no more days left.

Our liturgy reminds us of this, because when our time in this world has ended, a new life, eternal life is ahead for us. The gospels recall some of the things Jesus said about this end time. It recalls things Jesus said about the end of Jerusalem, the destruction of the Temple, the end of the world as we know it now and the second coming of Christ. Two weeks ago we heard about the destruction of the Temple. Today the focus is on the coming of the Son of Man; that is, the second coming of Christ. We will be busy in the next few weeks getting ready to celebrate the birth of Jesus, but the Church wants us to also get ready for the coming of the adult Jesus who will establish forever God's kingdom of peace and love.

The gospels insist no one knows when that will happen. People have been predicting Jesus' second coming for 2000 years, and they've all been wrong. St. Paul gives us some idea of what it will be like when it does take place. Paul's description of the second coming was in response to the fear that the Thessalonians had that their loved ones who had died would miss out on the great event when Jesus would come again. I would like to quote what he tells us in I Thessalonians: "Indeed, we tell you this, on the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will surely not precede those who have fallen asleep (*i.e. relatives and friends who have*

*died*). For the Lord himself, with a word of command, with the voice of an archangel and with the trumpet of God, will come down from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Thus we shall always be with the Lord.” (*1 Thessalonians, 4,15-17*) (*Translation taken from New American Bible*)

Today's gospel does not give us such a clear picture of the second coming, but it does give us a message that is extremely important: don't let his second coming catch you by surprise. Jesus tells us it will be like the flood at the time of Noah: no one was ready for it except Noah and his family; it will be like a robbery, no one gets a notice from the thief saying what day or time he or she will show up. The example of the two men working in the field or the two women grinding at the mill shows the suddenness with which it will happen; it also infers one out of each pair would be marked for salvation and one for judgment because one was ready and one was not.

How can we be ready? I suggest we ask ourselves what would we do if we knew for sure Christ was returning to earth in his second coming this year on December 25. Perhaps we would spend a little more time in prayer, or reading the gospels, or going to confession, or coming to Holy Hour or morning Mass during the week, or doing some charitable works. Maybe if we can't think of anything special to do, we could ask our Lord for a suggestion, then quietly wait for an answer. This time of the year is a busy time and before we know it Christmas will be here and gone and we'll be remembering the theme of "Sunrise, Sunset," and wondering where the day and weeks have disappeared to.