

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 back 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 in greater detail the torture of seven brothers and their heroic mother. A shorter portion of this reading was chosen today because the focus of this passage is on belief in the resurrection of the dead. 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, who did not believe in it, challenged Jesus about the resurrection. Their goal was to confuse or embarrass Jesus with what they thought was an insoluble question.

HOMILY

The Sadducees, who feature in today's gospel, were members of the Jewish aristocracy and the Jewish priesthood. They were the archconservatives in Jesus' time. They did not believe in angels, spirits and the resurrection of the dead on the last day. What they were trying to do in today's gospel is to prove, with an extreme example, that belief in the resurrection of the dead is nonsense. They based their example on a law from the Book of Leviticus. 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. It needs to be mentioned that in that culture, a woman needed a man to care for her and especially support her. Without a male relative in her life, she would be destitute. By the way, a Jewish man could have two wives, so there was no law against adding another wife to the family. If a man died and his brother married the widow, that would preserve the name and memory of the brother who died; it would keep in the family whatever property the brother had; and it would ensure that the widow would be provided for. The Sadducees really didn't believe there was life after this life, but even if that were possible, in their minds it would be very similar to life as we know it now. Jesus tells them that's where they were mistaken. He simply informed them that, at the resurrection, our life would be significantly different from life as we now know it. He said we will be like angels, we will be children of God and we will rise. His answer leaves us dealing with mystery; for example, who knows how angels live?

I want to give you an example of how I think of it. The example comes from a book entitled: *The Secret Life of the Unborn Child*. The author tells the story that one evening he was listening to the radio and the announcer introduced Boris Brott, the conductor of the Hamilton (Ontario) Philharmonic Symphony orchestra. The announcer asked several questions about opera, then he asked how Brott became interested in music. Brott answered that it had been part of his life since before he was born. This is how he explained what he meant when he said "since before I was born." When he was a young man, he would often surprise himself by being able to play

certain pieces, sight unseen. As a conductor he discovered occasionally he would be conducting a piece for the first time, and he would know the flow of the cello part before he turned the page. One day he mentioned this to his mother who was a professional cellist. He thought she would be intrigued, and she was. When she heard what the pieces were, the mystery quickly solved itself. All the scores Brott knew, sight unseen, were ones she used to play while she was pregnant with him. An example of prenatal learning. It's also an example about how different life is for us before we're born and after we come into this world. I think that life in today's world is like an unborn baby, and death is like being born into another world that is so totally different than anything we can compare it with. That's why we do not need to take anything with us when we leave this world. The Book of Revelation tells us all we will take with us is our good deeds.

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time– C Cycle

November 13, 2016

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: When we come to Mass, we like to hear about God's love and care for us. We hear that in today's readings, but we also hear a lot of doom and gloom. We hear about natural disasters as well as suffering that humans inflict on one another. If you are thinking to yourself, "we get enough of that in the news without having to come to Church to hear about it," just stick with me; God's word is always a support to our faith, hope, and love.

Our gospel began with a discussion about one of the most outstanding and beautiful buildings ever built - God's Temple in Jerusalem. Actually it wasn't fully built yet; it would still be in the process of being built for another 25 or 30 years. Jesus may have been in awe, too, but he brought a healthy dose of reality to his hearers when he prophesized that this beautiful Temple would be totally destroyed in a very short time – which is what happened seven years after completion. Perhaps knowing that was part of the reason he wept over Jerusalem as he and his disciples arrived there.

This whole passage is very complicated when we look at Luke's version of what Jesus said and compare it with Matthew and Mark. All the suffering and upheaval that the gospels speak of gets mixed up with comments Jesus made about the destruction of the Temple, the destruction of the city itself and, ultimately, with the destruction of the entire world. The passage from Luke, which we just heard, is only focused on the Temple. It goes on to predict the end of Jerusalem and the end of the world, but we do not hear about that part in today's reading.

Throughout the centuries students of the Bible have tried to make predictions about the end of our world as we now know it. It was often a tradition of the great prophets to give people signs that God was about to do something - either to correct his people or to favor his people. Jesus tells us if we're looking for signs, we should not to be confused by deceptive signs and false prophets. Many people will be caught by surprise when some of these things begin to happen. He tells his listeners there will be wars, earthquakes, famines, plagues, persecutions, and great

signs coming from heaven. History books, attempting to record the past 2,000 years, are full of these things. Unfortunately, things continue to get worse. For example, there are over 15,000 nuclear weapons in the world today. That should be enough to motivate all of us to spend a little more time sitting in Church praying for peace.

Yet, in spite of all this doom and gloom, Jesus promises he will always be with us. Not a hair on your head will perish. Our faith is tested in many ways throughout our lives. It's not signs in the future we need to look for in order to start living as Jesus taught us, it is the voice of Jesus in the present that calls us to follow him even when it calls for sacrifice.

Jesus is our great savior, one who has taught us God's ways and who seeks to lead us into God's everlasting kingdom of peace and joy. I would like to add a word about some of the turmoil we are experiencing as we prepare for new leadership in our country. Through the election process, Donald Trump has been chosen to lead our country through the next four years. There are those who are not happy with this decision. Everyone is entitled to their own opinion, but however one feels, let us at least pray for Donald Trump to be guided by God's wisdom and grace. Like it or not, our country's prosperity or lack thereof will be largely determined by decisions he and his staff make.

Christ the King– C Cycle

November 20, 2016

INTRODUCTION (*2 Samuel 5, 1-3; Colossians 1, 12-20; Luke 23, 35-43*) To better understand our readings, we have to begin when the Jews arrived at the Promised Land. After Moses died, God chose others who would lead his people in the ways of righteousness. These leaders, such as, Joshua, Samson, Deborah, Gideon and Samuel, were called Judges. When the Hebrews observed that neighboring nations were ruled by kings, they thought if they had a king they would be more powerful. God then gave them permission to have a king to lead them, the first king being King Saul. When Saul was killed in battle, the kingdom became divided into two parts, a northern and a southern part. David ruled in the south; King Saul's son, Ishbaal, ruled in the north. Ishbaal proved to be incapable of leading, so after a few years, 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 serious moral misbehavior, for which he repented, the Jews always hoped for another king with David's talents and capabilities. Many kings came to the throne in the years following David, but none could match David's capabilities. Solomon, David's son and successor, bankrupted the nation. When he died, the northern part of Israel rebelled and established their own kingdom. It lasted a couple of hundred years and then it was destroyed by the Assyrians in 722 BC. The southern kingdom lasted twice that long and, for over 400 years, one of David's descendants was king. In 587 BC the Babylonians invaded and destroyed the south and killed the Hebrews who they did not take into exile. The Babylonians ruled for another 50 years until the Persians defeated them. The Persians allowed the Jews still living in Babylon to return to Israel. But the Jews remained subjects of the Persians, who were eventually overcome by the Greeks, who were eventually overcome by the Romans. The kingship never returned to the Jews, but their longing for their own king remained strong through many centuries, even up to the time of WW II. Today we honor Jesus as the one God sent who would rule, not only the Jews, but who would rule the entire world. He would not be like other earthly kings, but he would rule eternally - guiding God's people by his spiritual presence until the day he comes again in glory.

HOMILY: Today is the feast of Christ the King. In spite of the fact that our country operates as a democracy and not a monarchy and that our ancestors fought to get free from being under the rule of a king, we need to remember that there is One who remains supreme over all of us, one who will always rule over us, our God. He does not rule with guns or ships or planes or bombs; he rules with love. His authority comes from the fact that he is the creator of all things. If he had not given us life, there would be no life. Our God, who is supreme, is not like any other ruler, power or king – even though we call him a king. The proof that he is entirely different is revealed to us in today’s gospel. There we heard about Jesus who, having been tortured and stripped and nailed to a cross, had a sign above his head identifying who he is: Jesus of Nazareth, king of the Jews. It doesn’t say he had been the king of the Jews; it doesn’t say he called himself the king of the Jews. It just says he is the king of the Jews. This had been publicly and officially proclaimed by no lesser person than the chief officer and representative of the powerful Roman Empire. No one would dare contradict Pontius Pilate, the governor of that province.

Our first reading today tells us how the northern kingdom of Israel chose David as their king 1,000 years before Christ. This is significant because God promised David through his prophet Nathan that one of David’s descendants would always be king of the Jews. The Babylonians put an end to that after 400 years as I said in my introduction, but it was only temporary because now again the Jews (and the rest of us too) are ruled by a descendant of David, Jesus, Son of David, and we will be under his rule forever. The sign says it all: Jesus of Nazareth, king of the Jews - king of all people.

He is a unique king, not concerned with grabbing power for himself but concerned about using his power to help and heal people, to teach and feed people, to save people from the power of evil and show them how to live in a way that pleases God. His forgiveness of the good thief (this day you will be with me in paradise) shows us the kind of king we have. Today we honor Jesus as our Lord and King, and we ask that we may be a part of his heavenly kingdom forever. Amen

1st Sunday of Advent - A Cycle

November 27, 2016

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

The prophet Isaiah, whom we hear in today’s first reading, lived over 700 years before Christ. He is prophesizing about Jerusalem; that Jerusalem would become the most important place in the world - the place from which God’s word would spread; the place where all the nations of the world would come together and form a bond of unity such that there would be peace everywhere in the world. It is probable that he had recently witnessed the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel by the Assyrians - fierce warriors who came from what is modern day Iraq. The Jewish citizens who lived in the southern kingdom, surrounding the city of Jerusalem, lived in fear and trembling that the same fate awaited them. But Isaiah sees a bright future for Jerusalem. It is here that we connect with the gospel. Jesus tells us this future peace and glory is linked to his second coming. It is a peaceful future that the world longs to see.

HOMILY: Just a few weeks ago, on my 79th birthday, I kept asking myself, “how did I get so old so quickly.” Time does go quickly; I’ve heard this said by many older people, “the older we get, the faster time goes by.” For instance, it seems to me that it was just yesterday when everyone was worried about the year 2000. When the clock struck midnight and the ball dropped, all the data in all the computers in the world would be lost or destroyed.

Today we are starting a new Church year as we begin again the liturgical season we call Advent. As I said earlier, Advent means coming and although we are preparing to celebrate the coming into the world of our Savior, Jesus the Christ, we all need to be reminded that it's not just his coming as a little baby that we are preparing for. The key words for today are "preparing for his future coming." There are very few things in life that are of value or importance that we can successfully avoid preparing for. I could never count all the tests I've had to prepare for in my lifetime; how embarrassing it was when I wasn't prepared. If a person plays sports, they prepare by exercise and practice and by taking good care of themselves. If we plan to get married or buy a house or get a job or move to a different city or whatever, don't we have to approach such events seriously and thoughtfully and analyze with the information we have whether we are making a wise move?

Most of us will be super busy in the next few weeks preparing to celebrate Jesus' birth. Why is it then that we place little emphasis on preparing for his second coming? I guess it's because it hasn't happened yet, and in the minds of almost everyone, unless we see the sun and moon and stars actually falling from the sky, we figure it's something we do not have to worry about.

Jesus, however, is telling us today that it is important for us to be ready for his coming, whenever that might be. Jesus uses the example of Noah's ark to impress on us that we better be prepared. In Noah's day, the people were unprepared for the flood which came so quickly, and they perished. People were in the midst of their everyday activities and, in an instant, it was all over for them. Jesus uses another example too: a robbery. A robber doesn't leave a warning at a person's house or business before he or she breaks in. So, Jesus says: "you also must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come."

How can we be ready? I suggest we ask ourselves what we would do if somehow we found out for sure that Christ was to return to earth in his second coming before this year came to an end. 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.

I would like to take a second to look at the second coming from a different perspective. Have you ever thought that maybe we are the reason that his second coming is so long delayed? For example, when we are forgiven, or we forgive someone else, Christ's kingdom of peace is in a small way touching our lives. When we do a kind act for a neighbor, friend or relative, again, we sense Christ's kingdom at work in our world. This time of the year is a busy time and before we know it Christmas will be here and gone. While the children are asking "is it here yet," we'll be asking ourselves, "how did Christmas get here so fast." Amen.