

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.” Words from our Gospel today from the 13th chapter of the Gospel according to St. Mark – sisters and brothers, may the Lord give to you his peace and his joy.

I’m sure everyone here has had one of those surreal moments in his or her lifetime. Those moments when what was seemingly important only a short while ago recedes into the background. Who cares about the Sabres score, when grandpa is so close to dying in the hospital...? That goal of becoming the best bowler in Western New York is put on hold when now there is a little one in the family home to love and take care of... When folks are hastening to evacuate in anticipation of an incoming storm, people readily leave their belongings behind in favor of their own safety... In moments like these, our plans and routines and all the rest of our ordinary lives get put on hold. Moments like these also make us think about life at a deeper level. Maybe it was the birth of your child and you contemplated what life would hold in store for this new creation, this newborn child. Perhaps, it was the death of someone close to you that made you question meaning, and human existence and God himself. Possibly, you had an encounter with tragedy and evil. There is plenty of this going around between abuse and mass shootings and terrorism let alone tornadoes and hurricanes and wildfires. How fragile life can be! And hopefully, all of us have had an experience of love; this doesn’t necessarily have to be a romantic love either. Receiving love affirms our self-worth while loving in turn pulls us out of ourselves, consuming our waking hours and even our dreams. Moments of friendship, conscience, truth, beauty, human solidarity, compassion, and protest are all surreal experiences that push us out of our day-to-day routines which comprise our ordinary existence, and at some point make us all contemplate life at a deeper level.¹

Around this time in our Church calendar each year, as we steadily draw towards the end of our liturgical year, the Church invites us to shift our focus from our day-to-day lives, put these things on hold for a little while, and think about life at a deeper level. Our readings begin examining the surreal moments of the end times, the Parousia, and the second coming of Christ who is to reign over the whole universe as our Lord and King. In our everyday

¹ William Portier, *Tradition and Incarnation* (New York: Paulist Press, 1994), chapter 1.

existence, we don't think too much about these things. Intuitively, we know that life is short, and so, we have become busy trying to live it to the fullest. Our daily routines have many other things that occupy our time and attention and for good reason. But at some point, we don't know when, everything that used to be important won't matter much anymore. Our readings are a sobering reminder that nothing lasts forever. Our readings advise us that heaven and earth as we know it will indeed pass away.

Jesus tells us today to learn a lesson from the fig tree... In winter, many trees lose their leaves and to all appearances they are resting almost as if they were dead. As spring approaches, the sap rises, the branches of the fig tree become tender, and leaves sprout to announce the arrival of summer. The lesson is that we can't control when the fig tree will blossom, but if we stop to think about it and read the signs that the tree gives, we can learn the patterns of its life cycle, discover how to cultivate it better, and plan our harvest accordingly. As it is, many of the surreal moments of our lives simply come upon us. We don't exactly plan when our next heart attack will be. We try to become pregnant for years, but we don't know the day or the hour when we will get that joyful news. Taking our cue from the fig tree and contemplating life at a deeper level, we would come to know that these things are a constitutive part of life itself. If we were wise, we would adapt our ordinary routines to prepare for such things. We would take care of our health, invest in insurance, take advantage of the opportunities love offers, live with no regrets, and indeed we do all this now because we don't know the day or the hour when these things will happen and don't want to be caught unawares.

What about our spiritual lives and our Christian existence? Have we learned a lesson from the fig tree? Have we considered the meaning of life in a real and honest way? There will come a time when all in heaven and earth will one day pass away and no longer be in our grasp, yet Jesus' word is the one that will remain. He promises that he will destroy the evils of sin and death. He promises resurrection and salvation. Where will we find ourselves on that day? Jesus offers to us the best eternal life insurance policy there is. We ought to invest in his unfailing word, so that we'll be eager and ready for that surreal moment when all that will matter is union with God himself.

Weekend Readings: <http://usccb.org/bible/readings/111818.cfm>

Thirty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Lectionary: 158

Reading 1 [DN 12:1-3](#)

In those days, I Daniel,
heard this word of the Lord:
"At that time there shall arise
Michael, the great prince,
guardian of your people;
it shall be a time unsurpassed in distress
since nations began until that time.
At that time your people shall escape,
everyone who is found written in the book.

"Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake;
some shall live forever,
others shall be an everlasting horror and disgrace.

"But the wise shall shine brightly
like the splendor of the firmament,
and those who lead the many to justice
shall be like the stars forever."

Responsorial Psalm [PS 16:5, 8, 9-10, 11](#)

R. (1) **You are my inheritance, O Lord!**

O LORD, my allotted portion and my cup,
you it is who hold fast my lot.
I set the LORD ever before me;
with him at my right hand I shall not be disturbed.

R. **You are my inheritance, O Lord!**

Therefore my heart is glad and my soul rejoices,
my body, too, abides in confidence;
because you will not abandon my soul to the netherworld,
nor will you suffer your faithful one to undergo corruption.

R. **You are my inheritance, O Lord!**

You will show me the path to life,
fullness of joys in your presence,
the delights at your right hand forever.

R. **You are my inheritance, O Lord!**

Reading 2 [HEB 10:11-14, 18](#)

Brothers and sisters:

Every priest stands daily at his ministry,
offering frequently those same sacrifices
that can never take away sins.
But this one offered one sacrifice for sins,
and took his seat forever at the right hand of God;
now he waits until his enemies are made his footstool.

For by one offering
he has made perfect forever those who are being consecrated.

Where there is forgiveness of these,
there is no longer offering for sin.

Alleluia [LK 21:36](#)

R. **Alleluia, alleluia.**

Be vigilant at all times
and pray that you have the strength to stand before the Son of Man.

R. **Alleluia, alleluia.**

Gospel [MK 13:24-32](#)

Jesus said to his disciples:

"In those days after that tribulation
the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light,
and the stars will be falling from the sky,
and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

"And then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in the clouds'
with great power and glory,
and then he will send out the angels
and gather his elect from the four winds,
from the end of the earth to the end of the sky.

"Learn a lesson from the fig tree.
When its branch becomes tender and sprouts leaves,
you know that summer is near.
In the same way, when you see these things happening,
know that he is near, at the gates.
Amen, I say to you,
this generation will not pass away
until all these things have taken place.
Heaven and earth will pass away,
but my words will not pass away.

"But of that day or hour, no one knows,
neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."