

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle C

Note: Where a Scripture text is underlined in the body of this discussion, it is recommended that the reader look up and read that passage.

1st Reading - Malachi 3:19-20a (Malachi 4:1-2a in all translations but the New American Bible)

This book gets its name from the phrase in 1:1 which is translated in 3:1. Malachi 1:1 says “The word of the Lord to Israel through Malachi” and 3:1 says “See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way for me.” Malachi means “my messenger.” Who this messenger was, no one knows. He is believed to have written this book after the rebuilding of the Temple (515 B.C.) and before the reform work of Esdras (458 B.C.).

Malachi is wholly concerned with the religious conditions of the Jewish community. He shows himself to be a patriotic Jew unable to tolerate mixed marriages lest the land become “unclean” from the “abominable and sensuous” types of worship common among the pagans. Staunchly loyal to his religion, he cannot remain silent at the sight of a priesthood that is ignorant, indulgent, and grasping. As a result, the people are very easygoing, and weak in the practice of their faith. Malachi energetically exhorts them – particularly the priests – to practice their religion in a more wholehearted manner, based on the love of God.

The author of Malachi, in his short book is best known for two of his prophecies: [3:1] “Behold, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me” which Jesus applies to John the Baptist in Matthew 11:10; and [4:5-6 (3:23 in the New American Bible)] “I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse” which Jesus also applies to John the Baptist in Matthew 11:14.

Our reading for today is sandwiched between these two prophecies and deals with the triumph of the just. The problem of evil is that just men suffer and unjust men prosper.

19 For lo, the day is coming, blazing like an oven, when all the proud and all evildoers will be stubble, And the day that is coming will set them on fire, leaving them neither root nor branch, says the LORD of hosts.

A day will sure come when the least shadow of evil will be totally swept away.

20a But for you who fear my name, there will arise the sun of justice with its healing rays.

This phrase draws upon a very common symbol in the ancient Near East. The sun, always one of the principal gods, was thought to provide warmth and life, light and law. The author of Malachi uses the same symbolism but identifies the deity as the one God, Yahweh. (See also 1 Corinthians 3:10-15).

2nd Reading - 2 Thessalonians 3:7-12

Today we conclude our three week study of 2 Thessalonians with Paul's words of encouragement to this struggling community. Some have misunderstood the timing of the second coming and have even given up working in anticipation of the event.

7 For you know how one must imitate us.

"A teacher demonstrates great confidence if he uses his own good actions to reprove his disciples. And so Paul writes, 'You know how one must imitate us.' And he ought to be a teacher more of life than of the word. Let no one think that Paul says this because of a boastful heart. The necessity of the situation in Thessalonica drove him to speak in this way, with a view to the advantage of the entire community." [Saint John Chrysostom (between A.D. 398-404), *Homilies on the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians* 5]

For we did not act in a disorderly way among you, ⁸ nor did we eat food received free from anyone. On the contrary, in toil and drudgery, night and day we worked, so as not to burden any of you.

Paul presents his own example both positively and negatively. This is what we did, and this is what we did not do.

⁹ Not that we do not have the right. Rather, we wanted to present ourselves as a model for you, so that you might imitate us. ¹⁰ In fact, when we were with you, we instructed you that if anyone was unwilling to work, neither should that one eat.

While awaiting the parousia, the Christian is to engage fully in his earthly tasks.

¹¹ We hear

The news is quite recent.

that some are conducting themselves among you in a disorderly way, by not keeping busy but minding the business of others.

Some, not all, are involved. Their disorderly lives consist in the neglect of fruitful work and great activity disturbing others.

12 Such people we instruct and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to work quietly and to eat their own food.

Every Christian is to support himself as he is able.

“This we must also keep in mind – that he who labors ought to perform his task not for the purpose of ministering to his own needs but that he may accomplish the Lord’s command, ‘I was hungry and you gave me to eat’ (Matthew 25:35), and so on. To be concerned for oneself is strictly forbidden by the Lord in the words, >Be not concerned for your life, what you shall eat, nor for y9our body, what you shall put on,’ and he adds ‘for the heathens ask after all these things’ (Matthew 6:25, 32). Everyone, therefore, in doing his work, should place before himself the aim of service to the needy and not his own satisfaction. Thus, he will escape the charge of self-love and receive the blessing for fraternal charity from the Lord, who said, ‘As long as you did it to one of these, the least of my brothers, you did it to me’ (Matthew 25:40). Nor should anyone think that the apostle is at variance with our rule when he says, ‘that working they would eat their own bread.’ This is addressed to the unruly and indolent, and means that it is better for each person to minister to himself at least and not be a burden to others than to live in idleness.” [Saint Basil the Great (after A.D. 370), *Rules Treated at Length Q,42,R*]

Gospel - Luke 21:5-19

Again, recall that Jesus is now in Jerusalem for His passion. As is usual for Luke, Jesus is speaking publically in the Temple.

5 While some people were speaking about how the temple was adorned with costly stones and votive offerings, he said, 6 “All that you see here--the days will come when there will not be left a stone upon another stone that will not be thrown down.” 7 Then they asked him, “Teacher, when will this happen? And what sign will there be when all these things are about to happen?”

Like all humans, the hearers want an indication of when the events are beginning. Maybe there will be time then to repent and be saved – this is surely easier than living the live God wants us to live every day of our lives.

8 He answered, “See that you not be deceived, for many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he,’ and ‘The time has come.’ Do not follow them!

The disciples should not confuse the destruction of the Temple with Jesus’ return.

9 When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified; for such things must happen first, but it will not immediately be the end.”

There will be a period beyond national/international crisis.

10 Then he said to them, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. 11 There will be powerful earthquakes, famines, and plagues from place to place; and awesome sights and mighty signs will come from the sky.

Standard biblical expressions for great sorrows. See 2 Samuel 24:13; Isaiah 8:21; Jeremiah 21:9; Ezekiel 5:12.

12 “Before all this happens, however, they will seize and persecute you, they will hand you over to the synagogues and to prisons, and they will have you led before kings and governors because of my name. 13 It will lead to your giving testimony. 14 Remember, you are not to prepare your defense beforehand,

The Greek word used here, *pro-méletaō*, occurs only here in the entire New Testament. It means “to practice gestures or rehearse a dance.” Christians are not stage actors.

15 for I myself shall give you a wisdom in speaking that all your adversaries will be powerless to resist or refute.

Luke 12:12 ascribes this inspiration to the Holy Spirit.

16 You will even be handed over by parents, brothers, relatives, and friends, and they will put some of you to death. 17 You will be hated by all because of my name, 18 but not a hair on your head will be destroyed.

Usually translated “perish.” The future resurrection of the body sustains the martyrs.

19 By your perseverance you will secure your lives.

Jesus exhorts His disciples to perseverance amid duress.