

SUNDAY READINGS

READ AT HOME

Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year C

13 November 2022



Collect

Grant us, we pray, O Lord our God,
the constant gladness of being devoted to you,
for it is full and lasting happiness
to serve with constancy
the author of all that is good.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

Readings and Commentaries

21 November 1964 was the historic day on which the bishops of Vatican II approved the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. It continues to be a source of inspiration for ecclesial renewal. The second last chapter, entitled “The Pilgrim Church,” has this to say about the end times that feature in all of today’s readings:

“Already the final age of the world is with us (cf. 1 Cor 10:11) and the renewal of the world is irrevocably under way . . . However, until the arrival of the new heavens and the new earth in which justice dwells (cf. 2 Pt 3:13), the pilgrim Church, in its sacraments and institutions, which belong to this present age, carries the mark of this world which will pass, and it takes its place among the creatures which groan and until now suffer the pains of childbirth and await the revelation of the children of God (cf. Rom 8:19-22).

“Since we know neither the day nor the hour, we should follow the advice of the Lord and watch constantly so that, when the single course of our earthly life is completed (cf Heb 9:27), we may merit to enter with him into the marriage feast and be numbered among the blessed (cf. Mt 25:31-46) . . .” (#48)

A reading from the prophet Malachi 3:19–20

The day is coming now, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and the evil-doers will be like stubble. The day that is coming is going to burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, leaving them neither root nor stalk. But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness will shine out with healing in its rays.

First Reading

In Hebrew Bibles, the book of Malachi is placed among the “Twelve,” the title given to the “minor prophets.” The fact that Judaism regards Malachi as the last prophet is more evident in those Christian Bibles that conclude the Old Testament with his writing. In a sense the prophet is anonymous since the word “Malachi” simply means messenger. He foresees Elijah being sent as a messenger to “prepare the way” for God (3:1.23). Jesus applies this to John the Baptist (Mt 11:10.14).

The book of Malachi is short, just three chapters. It’s considered to have been written around 450 BC when the Israelites had returned home from exile. As the prophet sees it, all is not well. He launches into trenchant criticism of the priests of the Temple and the people for their failure to uphold the covenant.

Today’s very brief reading is taken from Malachi’s oracle about the coming of the day of the Lord. It will be a day of fiery purification for sinners, but one of healing for those who fear God’s name. The rays of the sun will be a balm for them, as we are reminded every time we sing “Hark, the herald angels sing.”

The brevity of the text calls for readers to wait for the assembly to settle before they begin the proclamation. Their pace should be deliberate, but their tone of voice strong, as befits the force of the oracle.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 97:5–9

R. The Lord comes to rule the earth with justice.

Sing psalms to the Lord with the harp
with the sound of music.
With trumpets and the sound of the horn
acclaim the King, the Lord. **R.**

Let the sea and all within it, thunder;
the world, and all its peoples.
Let the rivers clap their hands
and the hills ring out their joy
at the presence of the Lord. **R.**

For the Lord comes,
he comes to rule the earth.
He will rule the world with justice
and the people with fairness. **R.**

Responsorial Psalm

There is no hint in Psalm 97/98 of the fiery fate with which Malachi threatens the wicked. Instead, it picks up and expands on the victory which those who fear the Lord may expect. They can look forward to the Lord who will come to “rule the world with justice and the peoples with fairness.” This happy prospect is cause for praise and thanksgiving. It’s good news not only for the peoples of the earth, but for the whole of creation. Seas, rivers and hills are called upon to join in the chorus of praise.

The entire psalm celebrates the all-encompassing salvation which God’s power will accomplish. The verses selected for the responsorial psalm capture its spirit well. The response, taken from the conclusion to the psalm, may appear at first to be rather matter-of-fact by comparison. Readers should announce it with the jubilation that pervades the verses that follow.

As usual, they need to respect the poetic form of the psalm and give each line its proper weight. That means cuing the assembly in with the right verbal and visual prompts in the second, five-line, stanza.

A reading from the second letter of St Paul to the Thessalonians

3:7–12

You know how you are supposed to imitate us: now we were not idle when we were with you, nor did we ever have our meals at anyone's table without paying for them; no, we worked night and day, slaving and straining, so as not to be a burden on any of you. This was not because we had no right to be, but in order to make ourselves an example for you to follow.

We gave you a rule when we were with you; not to let anyone have any food if he refused to do any work. Now we hear that there are some of you who are living in idleness, doing no work themselves but interfering with everyone else's. In the Lord Jesus Christ, we order and call on people of this kind to go on quietly working and earning the food that they eat.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke 21:5–19

When some were talking about the Temple, remarking how it was adorned with fine stonework and votive offerings, Jesus said, 'All these things you are staring at now – the time will come when not a single stone will be left on another: everything will be destroyed.' And they put to him this question: 'Master,' they said 'when will this happen, then, and what sign will there be that this is about to take place?'

'Take care not to be deceived,' he said 'because many will come using my name and saying, "I am he" and, "The time is near at hand." Refuse to join them. And when you hear of wars and revolutions, do not be frightened, for this is something that must happen but the end is not so soon.' Then he said to them,

'Nation will fight against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes and plagues and famines here and there; there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven.

'But before all this happens, men will seize you and persecute you; they will hand you over to the synagogues and to imprisonment, and bring you before kings and governors because of my name – and that will be your opportunity to bear witness. Keep this carefully in mind: you are not to prepare your defence, because I myself shall give you an eloquence and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to resist or contradict. You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relations and friends; and some of you will be put to death. You will be hated by all men on account of my name, but not a hair of your head will be lost. Your endurance will win you your lives.'

Second Reading

Apart from his own letters, the only testimony we have about Paul's missionary life comes from the Acts of the Apostles, but it does seem to corroborate his claim to be constantly, even astonishingly, busy about the work of the gospel. There are no grounds for accusing him of idleness. So it's no surprise that he isn't impressed with the Thessalonians who have abandoned work and become a nuisance to the whole community. This is exactly the kind of thing he had scrupulously avoided himself.

In the Thessalonians' defence it seems they are victims of misinformation. They have been led erroneously to expect Christ's imminent return, so work and normal life had lost its purpose. Paul has to advise them "to go on quietly working and earning the food that they eat." As he does a number of times in his letters, he presents his own example for imitation, as was common practice among moral teachers of the day. In comparison with the warmth and breadth of last week's reading, this passage from the concluding section of the letter appears prosaic, but the underlying issue – Christian expectation of the risen Lord's return in glory – is of profound importance. It is the horizon against which believers live out their gospel lives. Understanding this will enable readers to bring this disciplinary instruction to life.

Gospel

In the interval between Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem and his execution outside the city, the Temple plays a significant role. Having cleansed it of merchants, Jesus makes it his base for teaching and disputation. In the episode immediately before today's reading, he contrasts the widow who contributes a couple of coins – "all she had to live on" – with the wealthy who give from their surplus.

The people's comments on the Temple's magnificence trigger a series of warnings from Jesus. The Temple will be destroyed, there will be wars and cosmic convulsions, betrayals and persecutions. As with the parallel discourses in Mark and Matthew, it is difficult to distinguish between historical events such as the destruction of the Temple and early Christian persecution on the one hand and prophetic imagery about the end times on the other.

Certainly there are signs of Luke's awareness that time was to pass before the parousia. "The end is not so soon," Jesus says. Persecutions and betrayals will occur "before all this happens." What his followers need is stamina: "Your endurance will win you your lives." All succeeding predictions of the end times have proved false. Even contemporary threats – the possibility of planetary catastrophe from either nuclear war or global warming – are no guide to the divine wisdom which will determine the ultimate destiny of creation. Faith and hope remain integral to daily living.

Words of encouragement leaven the dough of Jesus' warnings. These should be given clear emphasis when they appear in this turbulent text.

Concluding Prayer

Solemn Blessing (Ordinary Time III)

May almighty God bless us in his kindness
and pour out saving wisdom upon us.

Amen.

May he nourish us always with the teachings of the faith
and make us persevere in holy deeds.

Amen.

May he turn our steps towards himself
and show us the path of charity and peace.

Amen.

And may the blessing of almighty God,
the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
come down on us and remain with us for ever.

Amen.

(Adapted from the Solemn Blessing for Ordinary Time III, Roman Missal p. 715)