

HOMILY, 33RD SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME “B”
ST. LUKE CATHOLIC CHURCH, INDIANAPOLIS
NOVEMBER 14 – 15, 2009
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A number of years ago, there was a great discussion in the monastery coffee room as to the exact beginning of the Liturgical Movement. All manner of examples were cited from the past. Some wondered what impact all this would have on the future of the liturgical life in the church. This, as you might imagine, led to all kinds of speculation about the future of liturgy. All the while this animated discussion was taking place, one of the senior monks, Father Placidus, was sitting off to the side listening. Father Placidus was a very quiet man, somewhat dour in appearance. He had the wisdom of one who had lived the monastic life for a long time. When there was a break in the lively exchange, Father Placidus calmly and flatly observed “the liturgical movement begins every morning at 5:30!”

This is a story that has lingered in the oral tradition of our monastic community. It lingers because it has a certain truthfulness, and, in a somewhat facetious manner, cuts through all the jargon, opinions and speculations to bring everyone to the reality of the present moment: whenever it began, or however it will look in the future, the praise of God takes place everyday, here in this present time.

As we approach the end of another liturgical year with the Feast of Christ the King next Sunday, the Gospel readings from Mark portray the visions of the end times. For weeks now we have focused on Jesus’ teaching his followers the lessons of discipleship. Now that He has arrived in Jerusalem and the ultimate manifestation of His identity on the Cross, we are struck by the mysterious and devastating scenes of the end of time.

The challenge of the Scriptural message today is to be mindful of the past, be watchful of the future and to live in the present.

It is so easy to be overwhelmed by the catastrophes of our world. Wars, famine, all manner of natural disasters, combined with our humanly manufactured violence, abuse and global anxieties can paralyze us into hopelessness. As the scripture readings state, the starlight and the sun that marked the glory of creation now turns to darkness.

Another temptation is to become too focused on the future and the return of Christ in glory. Endless speculation about who will be included or excluded from the kingdom of God, ceaseless worry about not being ready, constant preoccupation with the timing of all this can easily cause us to miss the point of living in the here and now.

And, that is truly the third option: to live in the here and now. The emphasis of the Gospel today is the promise of God and God’s glory to all those who, in fact, choose to live watchfully in the present. The point is that Christ Jesus dwells with us now. He is among us, Emmanuel: God with us. He is here in the Word of the Bible that becomes flesh again and again in our intentional Christian behavior. He is present in Sacrament, the effects of which continue to unfold in the manner in which we feed one another with love, and slake the thirst of our brothers and sisters with justice, peace and witness. He is present in our charity, our prayer, the beauty of creation and our careful stewardship of our world.

The only true way to be ready for the end of time is to live in the time we have today. Staying close to Christ in the company of one another is the best way of being vigilant, watchful and ready for that unannounced day when Christ will return in glory and we will come to know the fullness of the Kingdom of God. The present situation in the world, indeed, in our own church, serves as a caution of how NOT to live. The media offers, night and day, a ceaseless round of inflammatory scenarios scrambling for some insight. This is alternated with heated speculation about war, suspected political lying and sewing yet more seeds of discontent within church membership about a variety of positions that helps very few. All of this is punctuated by legalese, posturing, pandering for attention and precious little helpful insight. The task as citizens of this world and most especially as citizens of the world to come is to live in the present. Seeking Christ in our midst, promoting Gospel living NOW is the only true way of being watchful and vigilant.

Today's Gospel is a connecting link between Jesus' ministry and his passion. It addresses us as we seek our own connection between heaven and earth, between how we are living in this world and how we will be in the world to come. A sign of God's presence in the ancient world was the emergence of order out of chaos. Should we find ourselves at times struggling with chaos in our own lives, we must depend on God to bring about a new order. In fact, He has already begun in our baptism wherein we "put on Christ", received the Light of Christ and were given the commission to live as Christ-ed people who look forward to the completion of the new order in Christ. The vision presented to us in the Gospel nudges us toward trust in God.

The Lord will return in glory. His presence is our light, and that light shines on the opportunities for loving, living and keeping watch TODAY. In doing so, we will mirror with our very lives, the words from the Book of Daniel: "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."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. Do I try to recognize the presence of God in my life moment by moment?
2. Do I pray as an act of trust in God's Providential plan?
3. Can I live each day as God's great gift to me, and help others to do the same?

