

First Impressions 33rd SUNDAY -C-
Malachi 3: 19-20 Psalm 98 2 Thessalonians 3: 7-12 Luke 21: 5-19
By: Jude Siciliano, OP

Dear Preachers:

PRE-NOTE:

We have posted on our “Preachers’ Exchange” webpage homily notes by Fr. Chuck Dahm, OP for Thanksgiving Day on the theme of poverty. Go to <https://PreacherExchange.com> and then to “Justice Preaching.” (There you will also find similar homiletical reflections for Advent.)

Luke’s gospel today sounds like the front page of the morning newspaper. As I write this there are horrible things going on in the world and they are posted on the front pages of our newspapers. Yesterday another car bomb in Iraq killed 24 people who were in a marketplace buying food for their families; the slaughter and violence against civilians in Dafur continue; Iran may be constructing a nuclear bomb and some in the administration of our country are making war threats; a fire is ravishing San Diego here in the States; Atlanta may run out of water soon due to the most severe drought we have had in the Southeast in a century, etc. What Jesus said about the temple in Jerusalem, “There will not be left a stone upon another stone that will not be thrown down”—could be applied, in one form or another, to many peoples and places in our world today. For people suffering cataclysmic events the world must feel like it is coming to a violent and swift end, just as Jesus described in his apocalyptic teaching in today’s gospel.

The gospel isn’t only addressing people in past dire straits; it has a message for us moderns as well. Luke wrote at a time when the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple had already occurred. Today’s gospel passage is part of an eschatological discourse that deals with the last things (21: 3-36). It makes use of apocalyptic imagery to convey its message. What Jesus says about Jerusalem’s destruction had occurred and Luke’s readers had suffered the city’s ruin at the hands of the Romans. Christians, in particular, had suffered additional crises, for they were persecuted for their faith. In some cases, their own family members had betrayed them. So, the contemporary readers of Luke’s gospel had experienced the violence and endings Jesus had predicted. In many ways, religious, social and familial, their world had come to an end—the apocalypse had happened for them. But they had

survived, even thrived under persecution and they continued to give witness to their faith in Jesus.

The temple in Jerusalem has been torn down for a long time—only a prayer wall and some foundation stones remain. When Jesus was speaking about its destruction, anyone who heard him would have thought it impossible. They presumed the massive golden and white structure, that gleamed in the sunlight, would stand for a thousand years. But it didn't and when it was destroyed a world ended with it.

We all must deal with losses and endings each day. Family, friends and our communities experience various forms of dying and they are never easy. Cancer strikes down a former athlete; a marriage breaks up; an injury makes it impossible to keep a job; aging diminishes a once-vibrant person. And more. Our once proud church seems irrevocably damaged by scandal; our country is involved in a war that enervates our people and will affect generations to come; seeming low interest home mortgages become the cause for struggling families to lose the homes they worked long and hard to own. Think of how many ways we moderns can experience collapse and come to know the ends of our worlds.

When such calamities happen, at first, we find them hard to face. We try to struggle on and pretend that it isn't so bad. We think we can carry on and continue our lives as usual. It is hard to admit our pain and suffering. Jesus' advice fits here, as he warns us not to become misled, not to turn to false promises or illusionary escapes. "See that you not be deceived...." In times of testing, he warns us, there will be those who claim to have answers and solutions to our problems. They might even offer us shortcuts to spirituality. But Jesus wants us to live during end times without panic and in on-going trust of his presence with us.

Believers will encounter both internal and external strife. But at such times Jesus calls us to trust and stand firm. Our courage and strength in trials will give us opportunities to witness to others. When times of testing come, Jesus promises to give us the strength and then the words we need for our testimony. The times may be difficult for believers, but we can't give up, since we know who it is that stands with us. "...for I myself will give you a wisdom in speaking that all your adversaries will be powerless to resist or refute."

How optimistic Jesus is! What we experience as difficulties and painful endings, he sees as opportunities to witness to our faith in him. He will have to keep his promise about giving us “a wisdom in speaking,” especially when those around us are our “adversaries” and would contradict or laugh at our faith. We don’t have to be timid or afraid of being “put on the spot,” for we will not be on our own at such moments of testing, for Jesus promises to stand with us.

Jesus’ final words, “By your perseverance you will secure your lives,” sound like we are on our own. They make it sound like the advice we got from our hard-working predecessors—“keep your nose to the grindstone.” Faithful discipleship does require hard work, especially in times of testing and rejections. But it is clear from today’s gospel that the times will be so difficult that we cannot make it on our own. Jesus has told us that he will stay with us for the long haul. His closing promise, that we will “secure our lives,” reminds us that his Spirit accompanies us, not only in the testing time. He will stay with us until our lives are made “secure” by his return.

READER’S BOOK RECOMMENDATION

I have a wonderful book to recommend for all those who are trying to improve an understanding between the Jewish and Christian faiths and scripture. You may have read it. At the end of the book, the author, Amy-Jill Levine, gives concrete ways to improve the dialogue. She is a professor at the Vanderbilt Divinity School. The book is, The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus. I think this book is a must read for every homilist and educator.

Peace, Barbara Quinby

QUOTABLE

This is the advice of Clement W. Welsh, of Washington’s College of Preachers. He says, “*Let the preacher know that out there in the pew there is at least one listener expectantly waiting for a sermon that will interest, move, and inspire, and who is anxious to help--one listener, determined to survive.*”

---Joseph T. Nolan in, THE WORLD, THE CHURCH AND PREACHING: THE BEST OF GOOD NEWS COMMENTARY (Page 94).

JUSTICE NOTES

“But for you who fear my name, there will arise the sun of justice with its healing rays.” (*Malachi 3: 20a*)

"Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel."
(Synod of Bishops on Justice in the World, Rome:1971)

The School of the Americas (SOA), renamed in 2001 the “Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation”, (WHISC) is a combat training school for Latin American soldiers, funded with *our* tax money and located at Fort Benning, Georgia. Over its 60 years, the SOA has trained over 60,000 Latin American soldiers in counterinsurgency techniques, sniper training, commando and psychological warfare, and interrogation tactics, including torture. These graduates have often used their training to wage a war against their own people. Among those targeted by SOA graduates are educators, union organizers, religious workers, and others who work for the rights of the poor. The graduates of the school have been found responsible for the murders of Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador, Bishop Girardi of Guatemala, 6 Jesuit professors from the University in El Salvador, a number of Catholic priests and nuns and countless of other advocates for the poor, as well as thousands of the poor themselves when they protest their powerlessness and abject poverty.

Did you know?

1.

170 US Catholic bishops, and eight archbishops, have signed a resolution to close SOA/WHISC.

2. 140 bishops from Latin America, including 15 archbishops, have written letters supporting the closure of the school.

3. The Leadership Conference of Catholic Nuns has passed a resolution to close the SOA.

4. In June 2007, a House of Representatives vote to prohibit funding for the SOA/ WHINSEC lost by a only 6 votes.

5. HR 1707, Rep. McGovern's current legislation to suspend operations at the SOA/ WHINSEC and investigate atrocities linked to the school, has 117 bipartisan cosponsors!

(Submitted by Anne and Bill Werdel, from the parish bulletin of Sacred Heart Cathedral, Raleigh, NC)

POSTCARDS TO DEATH ROW INMATES

Inmates on death row are the most forgotten people in the prison system. Each week I am posting in this space several inmates' names and locations. I invite you to write a postcard to one or more of them to let them know that: we have not forgotten them; are praying for them and their families; or, whatever personal encouragement you might like to give them. If you like, tell them you heard about them through North Carolina's, "People of Faith Against the Death Penalty." *If the inmate responds, you might consider becoming pen pals.*

Please write to:.....

- John Scott Badgett #0014016 (On death row since 5/6/04)
- Paul Dewayne Cummings #0523493 (9/8/04)
- Alexander C. Polke #0801680 (2/7/05)

---Central Prison 1300 Western Blvd. Raleigh, NC 27606