

HOMILY 33rd SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME 2021
THE END IS COMING, BUT WHEN WE DON'T KNOW, SO LET'S NOT HOLD OUR
BREATH!?!

Mk 13.24-32

Dan 12.1-3

Heb 10.11-18

And now, finally it's the 33rd weekend of Ordinary Time, with a few scary thoughts about end times, but there's no need to hold our breath over 2,000 years on.

Weekday Masses have resumed from Tuesday to Friday mornings for all. Not one unvaccinated person came to the 10.00am open Tuesday Mass, so double vaccination will be the requirement for all who come from hereon in, for all Masses.

I'll continue to record Saturday evening Vigil Mass on-line on the parish website, for those who can't be here in person or who are still understandably anxious about present circumstances.

And, don't forget, in this month of All Souls, our Memorial Book is up front to acknowledge those who have died in the last year and those we have registered to be remembered; it will be on display in the church for this month of November.

What to make of today's Gospel, as we approach the end of the Church's year of Mark's Gospel? This is part of what is known as '*the eschatological discourse*', Jesus' last speech prior to the Last Supper, Passion, Death and Resurrection, sounding ominous and hardly optimistic about the future. Then again, it is about perseverance and survival, whatever comes, a call to patience and faith. Well, here we are, still thinking about it and wondering what it all means!

We are reminded have to face our mortality, perhaps naturally anxious what the future will bring, but also reminded that life is to be lived in hope, and faith and love to be shared, if we are to be genuine Christian disciples.

It's scary stuff if you want to take it literally, but I certainly don't! It is a timely reminder that we aren't here forever, and that we have a responsibility to protect and sustain ourselves and our planet earth, as the recent UN Glasgow COP26 (*Conference of the Parties – the supreme governing body of the international convention or treaty*), concerning Climate Change, formerly referred to as Global Warming, even earlier as The Greenhouse Effect! We've been aware of this for a long time now, in our own lifetimes.

It's notable that Australia was awarded the '*colossal fossil*' award, in some quarters, as dragging the chain on avoiding or minimizing positive action, in order to reduce carbon emissions and dependency on coal fossil fuels. In fact, we could see the current warnings as in some way related to the apocalyptic words of Jesus in today's Gospel, about reading the signs of the times, and doing something about it to avoid catastrophic events.

Even though we're experiencing '*winter in November*' here at the moment (*but this is Melbourne – rain, hail and shine in a day, or just on a walk, as I experienced recently, along the Maribyrnong River!*), and I had the heating on this morning when preparing these thoughts, the scientific fact remains that the planet is warming, with both the Arctic and Antarctic polar ice melting and the Great Barrier Reef (*our Australian wonder of the world*) is bleaching and generally deteriorating. The warnings are there, and Pope Francis, in no uncertain terms, reminds us in ***Laudato si***, what might be called his environmental '*green*' encyclical, of our part in it all.

The fundamentalists seem to not think this attitude worthwhile, because the end will come at Armageddon, with a Big Bang or Final Crunch, and there's nothing we can do about it, with only the 144,000 'saved' (not much hope for you and me!) caught up in the big Rapture, when Jesus returns, and the rest of us doomed, so why try to be good? This makes no sense at all! (*Haven't there have already been so many false prophecies about it all ending, thankfully, to no avail?!*)

To my mind, the real issue concerns living the good life, making the most of our opportunities, and picking ourselves up, with a little help from our friends, and the underlying strength which comes from faith and finding purpose in our lives through that faith, for us Christians, following the way of Jesus, in prayer and action. The joys and sorrows, the crosses of life are there all the way, sometimes big, sometimes small, but we can't escape them.

Jesus talks of 'happiness' in his Beatitudes, or *positive be-attitudes*, as I like to label them, but it's not about a personal happiness in isolation from others and the world around us. He is encouraging engagement and action in a challenging, troubled and fragile world, of which we are part, and not apart!!

Back when Mark was writing his Gospel in the second half of the First Century, there had already been significant persecution of early Christians, defections after initial enthusiasm, divisions in families and communities, as well as much joy from conversion and living out of the Gospel message and applying the law of love of God and neighbour, on which Jesus focussed so much of his teaching, time and energy.

Then, for those of Jewish background, there was the devastation of the Romans' destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70AD, but only after the bad and mad emperor Caligula had attempted to impose a statue of himself in that same temple in 40AD, but the statue was sculpted but never installed, as he was assassinated before it could happen.

It is the prophet Daniel who first speaks of '*the abomination of desolation*' (referring to false gods in the Jewish temple), taken up by Mark here, around the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, but the show must and will go on, despite all the suffering and tragedy, and so we see it does. So, here we are now, despite whatever terrible things have happened in human history since.

In our world, there has been, and continues to be, much suffering, darkness and evil, to be countered by the need for acceptance more than mere tolerance, compassion, understanding, forgiveness and peace, all integral aspects of the Gospel message proclaimed by Jesus! There's no perfection here, but we keep trying to make it a better world for all, in our own time, but looking to the future too.

On 11th November, we've again just commemorated Remembrance or Armistice Day, where we acknowledge the service and sacrifices made by those who served, but also the horrors of and the hell which is war. '*War no more*' has been and continues to be the cry of successive popes and many others, but, sadly, often to no avail. Apocalyptic events continue to occur in our world, as life goes on. So, surely it is our responsibility to do what we can to spread the word of peace and good will, and not just at Christmas, which is coming fast, yet again!

As scripture scholar Raymond Brown SS says: "*On the one hand, Jesus' followers are not to be misled by speculations and claims that the end is at hand; on the other hand, they are to remain watchful.*" And, of course, that's for you and me too, to be hopeful, active and watchful, not passive and fearfully catatonic, hiding in a dark corner!

Brendan Byrne SJ's line is: "*Hang in there! Despite all that is happening to you – painful though it may be – the world remains in the hands of God, who will not let evil and oppression triumph forever.*"

john hannon

14th November 2021