

33<sup>rd</sup> Sunday (C)

13<sup>th</sup> November 2022

‘Your endurance will win you your lives’

Mal 3: *the day is coming now, burning like a furnace ...*

Ps 97: *the Lord comes, He comes to rule the earth.*

2Thess 3: *go on quietly working and earning the food you eat.*

Lk 21: 5–19: *when you hear of wars and revolutions, do not be frightened ...*

Is Jesus referring there to the 70AD destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans under their general, Titus (later Emperor), ... or is He speaking of the end of the world? As He counters those words of admiration of all that “*fine stonework and votive offerings*” with the sobering, “*not one stone will be left on another: everything will be destroyed,*” His hearers might well have been taken aback by His solemn negativity. Of course, as so often in the Scriptures, it’s really operating on both levels. Jesus points ahead towards the events of Jerusalem’s collapse within 40yrs of His own day, but He also uses this horrific prediction as an image of the final conflagration and consummation of all things.

It’s typical of the end of the Church year to hear such readings. Jesus speaks of “*wars and revolutions, ... earthquakes, plagues and famines*”: calamities that indeed we seem to see around us without fail as we

watch/read/listen to the news. But, as Jesus also said, “*The end is not so soon.*” The apostles may have believed that the End of the World was around the corner; that Jesus would come in glory in His ‘Second Coming’ just a few years after His Ascension, perhaps in their lifetime, but in fact that was not the case. Here we are, 2000 yrs after the Ascension, still awaiting the end of time, yet none the wiser as to when this world will have its end.

The month of November is full of remembrances of our end, especially an acknowledgment of our mortality, our own earthly end. The month’s prayers and Masses for the Holy Souls; our remembrance on Armistice Day (11<sup>th</sup> Nov); and this Remembrance Sunday of the war dead, ... All these memories are sombre thoughts as we reflect on this world, and our short life within it. But in fact, in this passage from Luke today, Our Lord doesn’t only allude to the horrors that the world has to face — wars, revolutions, plagues, famines — but also provides a much-needed message of hope amidst such trials and tribulations. In the midst of all these thoughts of mortality, comes the brilliant

shining light of the Gospel. Into the darkness of death shines the bright light of Jesus's Resurrection, and the hope that He brings.

It reminds us forcefully that the *life of the world to come* is the goal to which we are heading, and that even death itself cannot separate us from the love of Christ. In fact, as we hear, Our Lord praises those who give their very lives for Him — His blessed martyrs — and reminds us that “*your endurance will win you your lives.*” Jesus implies that His followers will be persecuted by the world around them, but He also tells them that He will be with them, giving them an eloquence that none can overcome. This eloquence is the Word of Truth that is Jesus.

All this blessed encouragement — not to get frightened by wars and revolutions (by the daily news from across the world!) and even by the inevitability of the mortal death of ourselves and our loved ones and to preserve our soul holy and spotless for the next life — is particularly relevant as we remember and pray for the deceased in this month of November. Whether young or

old, our departed loved ones have touched our lives in special ways, and whilst none of them was perfect, yet we have the confidence to pray for them and for their eternal happiness, since the Lord constantly offers us hope.

In the face of death and the struggle of life — the things that might sometimes get us down — Jesus promises *Himself*, His own life at the heart of ours: not just some vague good example, but His very life and breath, His Sacraments and His Spirit, to inhabit our lives and let us live with His own immortal indestructible life. And this is what sustains us each day of our life: the fact that this life is not all that there is, but that in fact He wants us to enjoy something far greater, far better, far happier, far more enduring, in eternal life. “*Your endurance will win you your lives,*” He says ... Our being faithful to Him in this world means that He will reward us for our faithfulness in the next world. We long for that life, don't we? We long to be free of the struggles and disappointments here below, to be united in faith for ever with the Lord of Glory, in His Resurrection, and with those that we pray will also be with

Him, our loved ones. And this is the point of our prayer for the dead: that they and we shall all enjoy the presence of God in holiness for ever together. For that to be the case, both they and we need the forgiveness of our sins; and for this we strive, through the devotions and sacraments that the Lord Jesus has given us here in the Church. He gave us these for our holiness, so that we would not fall away from Him, but be His for ever.

I think that especially when our loved ones have lived their Christian life faithfully from start to finish, we owe them a particular sense of gratitude for the example of their life. Those who have gone to the Lord in death, but till the very end have clung tenaciously and prayerfully to the Lord Jesus, despite often many medical challenges, are such blessings to us, for they portray that very teaching of Jesus, “*your endurance will win you your lives.*” It is of particular comfort, isn’t it, when we know that they tried their very best to live in close proximity to Jesus, manifest His love to others, and to convert their lives away from sin and frailty. We are then so much the more peaceful, I

think, about their deaths, having great hope that in their departing they were graced by a holy death. And not just that, but we draw such strength from them for our own lives as Catholic believers. They prove to us that it is possible, faithfully and to the end, to live the Christian life well. If they can do it, then so can we, with God’s help. His grace strengthened them through the trials of life, and that proves to us also that the Lord’s promises are real: He will assist us too, in all our necessities, if we cling to Him always in great faith.

The last time I flew anywhere distant (pre-Covid, this was), it was to Egypt, on pilgrimage, and I remember how heart-warming and very touching it was to see the Christian community — both Orthodox and Catholic — living joyfully amidst great trials. Bishops and their people, monks and missionaries, sisters and seminarians, all committed to their faith in a land that is often hostile to them. One of the most moving sights was to see the pillars in a church in Cairo which still bear the scars of the bomb blast that killed 29 at Mass on December 11<sup>th</sup> only 6 yrs

ago. But the church is open, the parish thrives — the police are on the gates, admittedly; and we had a police escort ourselves, all week — but there was nothing to be worried about: “*do not be frightened,*” says Jesus, “*Your endurance will win you your lives.*”

Let’s dig deep into ourselves, let’s find those new wells of commitment that spring from real love for God. Encouraged by the martyrs, especially those of our own day; encouraged by our departed loved ones, especially those who shouldered great burdens yet kept the faith — let’s renew our promises to the Lord that we will love Him, serve Him, honour and adore Him, to the end of our days. No greater happiness can come to us than through this blessed use of the life God has given us.

It’s the mark of the Church that we are one in Christ: Our Lady and the saints pray for us; we here below pray for the dead; one day the Church on earth will be praying for us too that we enter heaven ... The Church is one undivided community of faith, a sign that humanity should all be one before God in Christ ... Let us live that out

today as we gather around the one altar of Jesus, and offer to God the sacrifice that Jesus once offered on the Cross, for the intended salvation of all mankind. Let’s remind ourselves that as we offer this sacrifice, He truly comes to be with us, the Son of God, offering His perfect love to God the Father on our behalf. Filled with His presence, we know that He, in us, can overcome all things, even death. This is our consolation when we are bereaved, or bereft — this is the source of our joy as His Christian people. As the 1<sup>st</sup> reading proclaimed: “*For you who fear My Name, the sun of righteousness will shine out with healing in its rays.*”