

HOMILY

The Thirty-third Sunday of Ordinary time

November 18, 2007

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In this dark and windy month of November, we dwell a lot on the idea of death. The leaves have faded and pretty much fallen. We have celebrated All Souls Day. We have had memorials to remember the departed. This past week we commemorated Veteran's Day, recalling those who served our country both in times of peace and times of war.

As the church year comes to a close, it is exactly in this same month of November that the Liturgy looks to the future, to glory and hope. God's message to us today is a tonic to the approaching winter and the continuing economic difficulties that we are facing here in Michigan and around the world.

But God's word does not promise us a "solution" as the world defines the term. The Liturgy reminds us that the world as we see it is not the final reality. After all, we say three things at the Eucharist:

Christ has died, Christ is risen, AND Christ will come again!

Our faith has always held that the reality around us is somehow transitory. The world is important. Our lives matter. We must live fully engaged in the world, but we must see it in God's perspective. God has plans for the transformation of this world that surpasses our power. Each of today's readings tells us something about this. The world of the Prophet Malachi was a difficult one, like ours in many ways. To the religious people of his day, the scheme of things seemed very unjust. The irreligious were becoming wealthier because they collaborated with foreign occupiers of the land, while they who followed the ways of their faith were excluded from wealth and power. The faithful poor in the time of Malachi took comfort in the belief that God would ultimately change the world. Justice would win out one day.

The Apostle Paul's audience believed the same thing. God was coming and coming **SOON!** They neglected their families and their work. They were just waiting around for the heavens to open and shower them with blessings. Paul

warns them that they must continue to be engaged in the society of their day. They must contribute to it, know and appreciate what is good about it. In the Gospel, Jesus tells his audience that we cannot know when history comes to an end, when the petty problems and the heavy grief will be replaced with eternal joy. There will be trials until then, but he says, “*By your perseverance you will save your lives.*”

All our struggles to show God to the world, all our efforts to be fair to the oppressed, all our efforts to be generous to the hungry, to live by the values of the cross and the empty tomb will one day be vindicated in an ordinary and extraordinary way. That is why British novelist Evelyn Waugh could say that for Christians everything is different. Our reactions to daily situations are different, our priorities are different, even our conversations are filled with this sense of another reality. So, while waiting for the end to come, we still have work to do.

A reflection by Bishop J. Terry Steib of Memphis sums up the work that still must be done:

For a world full of sin...
 we need a church full of holiness.
For a world that's going down...
 we need a church that's going up.
For a world filled with hell...
 we need a church filled with heaven.
For a world that's out of tune...
 we need a church that is in harmony.
For a world full of war...
 we need a church that's full of peace.
For a world full of crime...
 we need a church that's full of honesty.
For a world full of defeat...
 we need a church that's full of victory.
For a world full of “bad news”...
 we need a church that's full of “good news.”
For a world that believes in “playing”...
 we need a church committed to praying.
For a discouraged world...
 we need an encouraged church.
In a world at its worst...
 we need a church at its best.