



33rd Week in Ordinary Time: 14th/15th November

The Readiness is All

Reflection / Homily – Mgr Daniel McHugh

“To be near God is my happiness, to place my hope in God, the Lord.” (Communion Antiphon)

A post on Facebook the other day had these words:

*“Don’t worry about what tomorrow will bring;
The only thing we have is right now.”*

At the time St Mark was writing the Gospel we read from on the 33rd Sunday of the Year, the community he addressed was worried! It was written about the 30 to 40 years after the Death and Resurrection of Jesus. The Emperor Nero turned against the Christians, and many were martyred in Rome (about 64AD). At about the same time, the Jews who rebelled against the Romans saw their Temple in Jerusalem burned down in 70AD. In this time Mark’s Community may well have been anxious that the end times Jesus spoke about were at hand.

Jesus has been teaching the Apostles about his coming, Passion and Death, and now addresses the end times using Old Testament imagery especially from the Book of Daniel, which provides the first reading on the 33rd Sunday. While, He says to the Apostles “as for the day or hour, nobody knows it”, he clearly thinks living in the right way now means taking on board his “words [which] will not pass away” and being aware of the signs of the times. He speaks here of the Fig Tree as a parable: when its “twigs grow supple and its leaves come out, you know the summer is near.” We are more familiar with the Parable of the Barren Fig Tree, but this is about the fruitful one, the sign of the nearness of the harvest, and one that we should bear in mind as we are told to be ready for His return whenever it is.

Father Ferlita in his Reflection on the reading from Mark turns to the words of Hamlet in the Shakespeare play. Hamlet has arrived at a point in his life when he sees that he must not act out of murderous impulse but in accord with the Providence of God. In Act 5 Scene 2 we read “there is a Divinity that shapes our ends, rough hew them how we will.” And, later sensing the possibility of his own death, he says: “There is special providence in the fall of the sparrow. If it be now (meaning his own death), it’s not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come. **The Readiness is all.**”

Trust in God therefore says Ferlita. Act in accord with His providence. Keep Faith. Do not lose heart. Then he concludes: “pray as we prayed in the opening (alternative) prayer of the Sunday Mass:

“Father in heaven, ever living source of all that is good,

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*from the beginning of time you promised [us] salvation,
through the future coming of your Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ.
Help us to drink of His Truth,
and expand our hearts with the joys of His promises,
so that we may serve you in Faith and in love,
and know forever the joy of your presence."*

This alternative prayer has disappeared in the new edition of the Roman Missal. Speaking with fellow Priests about the new Synodality Pathway and wondering how we can reflect together on it with parishioners, we could do worse than to begin with that Prayer, making it our own and sharing our reflections on it with each other.

The ripe fig is so beautiful and a good image for the wonderful fruitfulness we enjoy through Christ and His Church. It would be a pity if we spent all our time speaking of the Barren Fig Tree, the failures of the Church and its people, so that we overlook the wondrous goodness we have through the Providence of God.

I conclude this week's Reflection pointing to the Martyr Saint Josaphat who did so much for the unity of the Church in the 1600s bringing part of the Eastern Orthodox Church into communion with Rome. He was one who had courage to live in the moment and gave his life for it. We celebrated his Feast Day on Friday 12th November with Ukrainian Catholics in our Diocese. A fuller account of St Josaphat will be given in this week's Podcast: Journey of Faith, Life from the Holy Mass. It is in the Eucharist especially that we find the fullness of God's love and in Saints like Josaphat that we are inspired by their "readiness" for His coming: "To be near God is my happiness, to place my hope in God, the Lord".

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