

## INI

Luke 21,25-36

Advent 2 — 4 December 2016

**Greeting:** To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you. Amen.

We hear a portion of the Holy Gospel According to Saint Luke, which was read earlier:

[Jesus said to His disciples:] “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My Words will not pass away.”

**So far the reading. Let us pray:** Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

**Introduction:** People are always interested in the future.

After getting up in the morning, for example, many want to know what the weather will be. Predicting the weather, however, can be a tricky business, and forecasts sometimes cannot get it right even for today’s weather, much less a long-range forecast.

Millions in North America want to know their personal future. Every morning they open their papers or go to the internet to find their horoscope and see what the stars and planets have to say. Thousands phone psychic hotlines to get more detailed information. Back in 2002, for example, the US the government fined a psychic hotline millions of dollars for defrauding clients. Amazingly the psychics could not predict that this suit was coming. While many consider using psychics or reading the horoscope as a harmless activity, and while most of it is

nonsense anyway, God clearly forbids this kind of activity. In Deuteronomy, God says: “There shall not be found among you anyone that ... uses divination or an observer of times or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For all these things are an abomination to the Lord.” (Deuteronomy 18,10-12)

On a more factual level, however, both governments and business use economic models to try to predict the future. The Federal Reserve in part adjusts interest rates on the basis of what it thinks the economy will do. Businesses use economic and marketing models as a basis for introducing new products, discontinuing old products, expanding or closing plants, and so forth. None of this, however, is an exact science. For example, Coca Cola tried to introduce “New Coke,” and the product was a failure. The Ford Edsel is a byword for marketing failure.

There is a whole subculture in Christianity that feeds on an excessive and unhealthy interest in the future. People want to know the time of Jesus’ return and what will happen. Many open their morning newspaper alongside the Book of Revelation and try to determine what is happening. There is a best selling series called “Left Behind,” that has cashed in on this unhealthy interest; this series is also based on a misunderstanding of Scripture. There are tele-evangelists who have based their careers on so-called prophecy, trying to determine when Jesus will return.

Interest in the future seems to be human. The disciples were interested in this as well. In our section of Scripture, Jesus was speaking about the future, about the coming destruction of Jerusalem and His eventual return. The disciples asked Jesus: “Teacher, when therefore will these things be? And what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?” (Luke 21,7). Jesus answers the disciples, and answers our questions as well. For unbelievers these are words that can

inspire fear; however, for believers these are words of comfort. Therefore, our theme for today is, “**Words Upon Which We Can Depend.**” I’ll develop this theme in three parts:

- 1) Certain Signs For Uncertain Times;**
- 2) An Enduring and Dependable Word;** and,
- 3) A Word Which Prepares.**

**1) Certain Signs For Uncertain Times.** In Chapter 21 of Luke’s Gospel, as well as in the parallel chapters in Matthew and Mark, Jesus speaks about the signs which will precede the destruction of Jerusalem and the signs which will precede His coming again in Judgment. On the one hand, the signs for both events are to some extent mixed together. It is easy to separate some signs from the other signs, but not everything is clearly separated. Also, it seems some signs are the same for both events, such as the persecution of believers. On the other hand, while there are some significant differences, for believers it does not too much matter because the reaction to both sets of signs is the same.

Jesus spoke about the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple. This occurred in 70 AD and was preceded by a Roman invasion of the country and culminated in a siege that lasted over a year. The people to whom Jesus was speaking thought that Jesus was talking hot air. They thought that such a destruction was unthinkable. They thought that the presence of the Temple would protect them against any destruction. But they forgot God’s word given to the prophet Jeremiah, “Do not trust in the deceptive words, saying, ‘This is the Temple of the LORD, the Temple of the LORD, the Temple of the LORD’” (Jeremiah 7,4), as if the Temple of the Lord is some sort of good-luck charm. While Jeremiah was speaking about the first destruction of the Temple in 587 BC, the same ideas apply in Jesus’ time. Even though Jesus spoke almost 40 years before the destruction took place, before the unthinkable came to pass, Christians fled the city and for the most part

were spared in the physical destruction of Jerusalem and the tremendous loss of life that accompanied that destruction. Believers saw certain signs in uncertain times. Unbelievers were woefully unprepared.

But Jesus also spoke about the Last Day, the coming Day of Judgment, when He will return in a cloud to judge the “quick and the dead.” Jesus said that before that great and awe-ful day there will be disturbances in the sun, the moon, and the stars; and on this earth the sea will be in turmoil. The reaction of unbelievers will move from “distress” to “fear and foreboding.” But nowhere do we read that the movement from “distress” to “fear and foreboding” will then move to belief. For after these signs comes the End. Believers saw certain signs in uncertain times. Unbelievers were woefully unprepared.

As distressing as these signs will be, and they will be distressing, for believers these will be a sign of hope. Jesus says that the signs for the Last Day will be like the sign of a fig tree. The fig tree is one of the few trees in the Middle East that loses its leaves. Just as when the fig tree begins to bud, these buds show that summer is coming, so these signs of upheaval show that the End is near.

When Jesus spoke of the destruction of Jerusalem and His coming again in Judgment, it was as if He was describing a mountain range. When we look at a mountain range, we see a series of peaks. But it is difficult to tell the distance between the peaks. So with Jesus’ description of the two events, it is difficult to tell the span of time between the events. We know, however, despite the difficulty of determining the span of time, Jesus has given us

**2) An Enduring And Dependable Word.** Jesus promises us that even though Jerusalem will fall, even though one day the heavens and earth will pass away, His “Words will not pass away.” The Words of Jesus are enduring and dependable because they are the Words of God

Himself.

Jesus is the Word become flesh. He is the Word “in [Whom] all things were created, both in the heavens and on the earth, visible and invisible” (Colossians 1,16). He is God become flesh. Of God’s Words, God through Isaiah said:

Surely the people are grass,  
The grass withers, the flower fades;  
But the Word of our God stands forever. (Isaiah 40,7b+8)

The Apostle Peter used this passage from Isaiah and added the words,

But the Word of the Lord abides forever, and this is the Word that was preached to you. (1 Peter 1,25)

Not only are we people grass, that is to say, we live and then die, but the universe around us is grass as well. Again we turn to Isaiah, chapter 51, and read:

Lift up your eyes to the sky,  
Then look to the earth beneath;  
For the sky will vanish like smoke,  
And the earth will wear out like a garment,  
And its inhabitants will die in like manner,  
But My salvation shall be forever,  
And My righteousness shall not wane. (Isaiah 51,6)

And in Psalm 102, the David says:

Of old You did found the earth;  
And the heavens are the work of Your hands.

<sup>26</sup> Even they will perish, but You endure;

And all of them will wear out like a garment;  
Like clothing You will change them, and they will be changed.  
<sup>27</sup> But You are the same,  
And Your years will not come to an end. (Psalm 102,25-27)

Even though everything we see is temporary, God assures us that He is permanent. God assures us that His Word is permanent. And the tremendous Good News is that all people who have been born from above and have that Word of God dwelling in them are permanent as well.

We know why things are not permanent, why people age, decay, get sick, and eventually die. The reason is sin. The sin with which we are born and the sins which we do. People may try various remedies to hide the process of aging. People seek after all sorts of remedies to stave off sickness. People even try programs to delay death. But death comes to all, for all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. If we want to know the future, God tells us we all have sinned and we all will die. No exceptions.

God's promise, however, is that His "salvation shall be forever" and His "righteousness shall not wane" (Isaiah 51,6). The salvation of God and His righteousness are found only in Jesus.

God's salvation is made good by Jesus for all people. What Jesus did can only be found as revealed in and by God's word. It cannot be foretold by fortune tellers or horoscopes or psychics.

In this Advent season we reflect on what God in Christ did for us. As Paul put it, "Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief" (1 Timothy 1,15). As we hear these words, each of us should put ourselves in Paul's shoes and realize: in God's eyes, of sinners we are the chief. Numero uno! It is for us – for you and I – that Christ went to

the Cross. He did not die for His own sins, for Jesus Himself was without sin; but Jesus died for your sins and mine. We may all say: “I am the chief!”

But on the third day Jesus rose from the dead. He conquered death. He now lives eternally. And Jesus shares His forgiveness and His life with us. He says: “I am the Resurrection, and the Life; He who believes in Me shall live even if he dies” (John 11,25). And again Jesus says to the disciples and all who shall believe in Jesus because of their testimony to Jesus, “Because I live, you shall live also” (John 14,19).

Jesus’ Words are sure, for He is the living God, and His Words endure, for as He rose from the dead He is alive and His Words live with Him.

Forty days after He rose from the dead, Jesus ascended into heaven. Before His ascension, however, Jesus promised that one day He would come again. In the intervening time, as He gave to the disciples, so He gives us also:

**3) A Word Which Prepares.** We are to be on guard, to be prepared for the second coming of Jesus, His coming in judgment. How then shall we do this?

Jesus says that there are things to avoid. He tells us that we should be on guard that your hearts may not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap.

The unbelieving people of the world seek escape from the monotony of life, the treadmill from birth to death, and resort to drink and other means to escape. Or they are burdened by the worries of day-

to-day life. Escape and worry can and will dull people to spiritual realities.

To be dulled is a temptation that can afflict believers. Many things can contribute to this and it can afflict the well-off and the poor. No one, regardless of his station in life, is immune.

Too little money or too much money can lead to spiritual dullness.

Prolonged illness and as well as the endless quest for perfect health can lead to spiritual dullness.

The tragedy of a loss in the family as well as the fear of a loss or even the seeming perfect life can lead to spiritual dullness.

The world, our flesh, and the devil stand ready at all times to shift our attention away from God to concentrate exclusively on the things of this world; or, they can deceive us into thinking of so-called spiritual things, such as horoscopes, psychics, false religions, and so forth.

But Jesus also adds a positive note when He admonishes us to

keep on the alert at all times, praying in order that you may have the strength to escape those things that are about to take place.

To be on the alert means first and foremost staying in God's Word. It means we do not depend on ourselves, but we depend of Christ our Savior. It means resting in the fact that, as Jesus says, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit" (John 15,16).

What does this mean? It means that Jesus has died for us, and forgiven us, and called us so that we can live for Him by living with and



for others.

He sustains us in our walk through life through His Word, the Holy Scriptures, and the Sacraments. In Baptism He has adopted us as God's children, His brothers and sisters in faith. Thus, we can respond to God's call to us by calling upon and speaking with Him; this is nothing less than prayer. Through partaking in His true Body and Blood in Holy Communion, He gives us His forgiveness and gives us strength to keep going, even in times that may be trying.

Jesus says that "this generation will not pass away until all these things take place." What is Jesus saying? There are many explanations. But in this context the word "generation" means a certain kind of people, a class of people, like a set in mathematics (not a physical group of people who live for 30 to 35 years).

From the context Jesus is not speaking about the Jewish people (although this is a popular interpretation), nor is He speaking about those who are physically alive when he is speaking and will see the End, the Day of Judgment come.

Rather He is using generation in the sense that it encompasses successive sets of people upon whom the signs have begun. The signs began with a birth in the manger and proceeded throughout Jesus' ministry, including the sign of Jonah, that Jesus would die and be in the earth three days but on the third day rise triumphant from the grave. The emphasis is not on the specific date of the End, but rather on the sure fact that He is coming again. Be prepared.

**Conclusion:** Today we stand in the midst of a world that is once again shaken by wars and rumors of war. People look for meaning in their daily lives and hope for a better or more certain future and seek all sorts of ways to gaze into their personal crystal balls.

But in the midst of all this, Jesus gives us a Word upon which we can depend. That Word says that He has forgiven us and has chosen us to be His. He has called us and sustains us every day through that Word. He sustains us so that we may have comfort in the tribulations of life, tribulations which he says are sure to come. But He says that if we are rooted in His word, then neither tribulation nor distress nor daily worry should deflect us from our course of being prepared and being on guard.

No one knows when the Day of Judgment will come. But Jesus says that we should not worry. As He came for us in the stable, so He will come again. We take comfort from the fact that we can depend on Jesus to sustain us to the end, whether that should be the day of our death before He comes, or whether we shall stand on that Last Great Day and be changed in the twinkling of an eye. As Paul says, “whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s” (Romans 14,8). Amen.

Now, may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

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