

33rd Sunday in the Ordinary Time (B)

(Daniel 12:1-13 / Mark 13:24-32)

15.11.2015

*To see*

In life there are many things which are beyond our reach, things over which we have no power and other things which we can change.

Today our Gospel reading illustrates this point: Jesus is very clear about the fact that none of us knows when the end will come, and in a way we can do nothing about it, and yet Jesus does not leave us completely powerless. There is something we can change. We are meant to see the signs. Twice Jesus tells that we are supposed to “see the Son of Man coming (...) and see these things happening”. Here is an area of our lives where we can do something: we can prepare our eyes to see, we can work on the way we look at people and at events so that we may understand and interpret them correctly. Ultimately, according to the Beatitudes, we have to prepare ourselves to see God.

Vision matters. To convince ourselves of this, we can go back to the first book of the Bible, where we are told that all the trouble began when Eve “saw that the tree was good, and that it was a delight to the eyes” (Gn 3:6). And in the last book of the Bible, the Lord says to the church in Laodicea: “Buy an eye ointment to put on your eyes so that you are able to see” (Rev 3:18).

If we want to prepare our eyes, the first step in the training process is to pay attention to what is going on around us. The main danger in life is to go through it without noticing anyone or anything. In 2009, a research suggested that a large proportion of car accidents occur when drivers appear to be in a comfort zone, driving close to home on familiar roads. They think that they know the place through which they are travelling so well that they do not need to look carefully. Really the main danger for drivers is blindness.

It is the same thing in life, when we do not look at the signs given by others, by nature, by our own bodies, when we do not want to really see what is happening in our families, in our workplaces, in the world around us then we prepare the best recipe for disasters.

In the sixties, successive British governments did not look at and did not want to see the Northern Irish question and then there was an explosion. For years the Catholic Church in this country remained blind to the sexual abuse scandals and then there was a huge crisis.

In our own lives sometimes we continue to walk, work and relate to others without really connecting with people and events. We are busy, running and chasing about and we fail read the signs. When this happens then often we hit a wall or, one day by pure grace, we stop and look back realising that we have been through life without seeing it, without savouring it.

In a way it is easier to rely on what we know – or rather what we think we know. When we are on a familiar track, the opportunities to be surprised or challenged are reduced, we feel secure. And yet, are we still speaking here about real life?

To see is to pay attention. And attention is at the service of discernment. We know that, out of the thousands of images which go through our eyes only a small amount can be processed by our brains. So there is a kind of natural sieving done by our physical and mental limitations. And yet once an image has reached our brains, there is need for a very intentional discernment in order to process its message. The reality is that all that what we see is not good. Images affect memory, behaviour and values. Images affect what we believe about ourselves, about others, and about the world out there. Here it is important to keep in mind

that the word *image* can mean an event or a person. What we see, and the way we see it, impacts upon us.

Narrow vision makes for narrow-minded people. We are meant to see beyond what we think we know. Like Moses, we are called to see “him who is invisible” (Heb 11:26). We are supposed to see the reality and not to stop at appearances, to see people and events for what they truly are, not for what we want them to be.

Ultimately if we do not want to become blind, if we really want to see in a right way, we have to look at people, events and things as God looks at them: with mercy, truth, patience and hope.

Before the referendum on same-sex marriage in the Republic of Ireland, I heard a Catholic woman explain that a majority of yes would be a sign that God is going to punish Ireland like he punished Sodom and Gomorrah. Whatever we may think about the referendum, I am not sure that this woman was reading the sign properly. Was she not rather projecting her anger and fear unto the Lord?

The language of God, as revealed in Jesus Christ, is a language of love. So if we want to understand God and to read the signs according to his mind, we have to read them with attention and discernment, and above all with love.

In Damascus, the disciple Ananias was sent to Saul who had been struck blind to tell him: “Brother Saul, regain your sight” (Ac 22:13). Today he speaks the same words to each one of us: “Brother, sister, regain your sight”. This gift of sight is not given to us so that we become prophets of doom or judgemental onlookers, it empowers us so that we may, according to Pope Francis, “view and interpret realities, today’s realities, through God’s eyes, so as to kindle the flame of faith and enlighten people’s hearts in times marked by discouragement (...) and growing pessimism.” (Synod Conclusion Speech, 24.10.2015)

May “Christ be the vision in eyes that see us, in ears that hear us” (*Christ be beside me*), may “Christ, whatever befall, still be our vision” (*Be thou my vision*).