

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)  
(Daniel 12:1-13 / Mark 13:24-32)  
18.11.2018  
End of Time & Unending Love

The verses from St Mark that we have just heard can boast of having generated many works of art, many books and pamphlets; they have captured the imagination of generations of men and women.

The sun darkening, the stars falling and the heavens shaking are part of a long tradition of apocalyptic signs. They are found in Isaiah 13 which dates from the 6<sup>th</sup> century before Christ. Two thousand years after the birth of Christ these images still grip people's imaginations.

In the past, many have tried – and in the present many are still trying – to know when all the things foretold here will happen. Today it is possible to meet people who are ready to give you the date of the end of the world and people who want us to believe that we are already in the apocalyptic season.

The irony is that we are clearly told that nobody – really nobody at all – knows when the Son of man will come back. This knowledge belongs to our heavenly Father alone.

In fact beyond all the biblical imagery and imagination, the when and the how of the coming of the Son of man is – and will always remain – a mystery.

Yet in our Gospel reading Jesus mentions one thing that we do know for sure: the Lord will return and our present time will come to an end.

How are we to be prepared for this second coming? Will we recognise the Lord when he comes and maybe more importantly will he recognise us as his own?

These questions are crucial and they have a very simple answer: the answer in one word is love. Love alone can prepare us for the Lord's return. If we are loving people then we will be able to recognise Love when he comes. If we are a loving people, if we have become Christlike, then Christ will be able to discern his features on our faces.

The problem with the apocalyptic signs described in today's Gospel passage is that they create a culture of fear, distrust and servile obedience. They are paralysing and, today more than ever, they tend to prevent people from engaging courageously in dialogue with our contemporary world.

It is clear that the second coming will be a time of judgement. Yet if love has been and is the focus and the rule of our lives, then we have no reason to be afraid. When God judges us, he does not cease to love us, on the contrary he loves us all the more.

Not to know the day or the hour of the Lord's coming is in fact a very good thing. It prevents us from being obsessed with something which will happen in the future. Our ignorance brings us back to the present, to the here and now, which is where we are called to live and love.

We must even acknowledge that the catastrophic signs which are so much part of the biblical tradition should not be taken as literally as it appears. In the 1<sup>st</sup> book of Kings, God does not reveal himself in the strong wind, in the earthquake or in the fire but in sheer silence (19:12).

We will be surprised when the Lord comes again. But we must be clear that God's purpose is not to surprise us in a shocking way. He is not a sadistic father wanting to catch us out when we are at our worst. In his great love, God warns us over and over again through his

Spirit at work in and around us in a way that seeks to coax us to choose what is best. As St Paul writes to the Corinthians: “The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God” and he reveals them to us (1Co 2:10).

Through the Scriptures, through the Sacraments, through the prophetic and teaching ministries of the Body of Christ, the Lord warns us that he is coming and that we have to be ready.

If we are surprised, it is because we have not been vigilant, because our hearts and minds have not been focused on the things that really matter.

And the only thing that really matters for you and for me is love. From this perspective the eschatological image of the wedding, used by Jesus (Mt 22:11-14) and by St Paul (Ep 5:27), in order to evoke the coming of the Lord is highly appropriate because it speaks of love which is at the core of God’s relationship with each one of us.

St John of the Cross reminds us that “at the evening of life, we shall be judged on our love”. In fact not only will we be judged on love but by Love himself.

It seems to me that the apocalyptic imagery of the Scripture should not detract us from what is essential, God is a gracious and merciful Father who comes to justify the sinners not to destroy them. He takes us seriously and he respects our decisions but now and at the end only love remains.