

Homily For Tuesday of the 34th Week of Ordinary Time - Year 1

St Peter's 8:30/7:00 Masses - November 28, 2023

Daniel 2:3,9,10,27,31-45 "The God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed."

Daniel 3:57-61 "Sing praise to the Lord and highly exalt him forever."

Luke 21:5-11 "The day will come when not one stone will be left on another. Do not to be led astray."

A Sure Dream

Introduction

Kings follow kings. Presidents and Prime Ministers and dictators follow one another. Even when they don't ask to be worshipped, they seek to be elected. There have always been a few rulers who understand that all authority comes from God, and that they are only the caretakers of that authority. In the books of the kings of Israel, it says that this kind of king "did what was right in the sight of the Lord." The other kind of king is one who uses his power and authority as if it belongs to him, and he holds on to it by fear and force. The two Books of Kings identify them as those who "did evil in the sight of the Lord."

Where I used to work, there was a new manager after the previous one had been there for a long time. He was evaluating everything that went on and almost everyone was grumbling and anxious about changes that appeared to be coming. In a meeting of our whole group, employees were questioning this process until the new manager, clearly frustrated, blurted out, "Look, the king is dead. Long live the king. Get used to it." That changed everyone's attitude. He was right, we realized. He is the new manager, the new king, and will do things his way.

Daniel

Judah was the kingdom of the Israelites, which had been ruled by increasingly corrupt kings at the time when Babylon was the great world power, ruled by the cruel Nebuchadnezzar. When Babylon conquered Judah, he took the best and brightest back to Babylon. Daniel and his companions were in the first of three

waves of those deportations. The king was as smart as he was cruel. He recognized Daniel's wisdom as ten times that of the sages of Babylon.

The king has a troubling dream about a statue. In the ancient world, a statue was an object of worship. Nebuchadnezzar had statues made of himself for that purpose. He was even called 'king of kings'. He wants to know what the dream really means. He doesn't want fake news, so he asks his own wise men to tell him what the dream before he will trust their interpretation. To fail is to be executed. To a man, they refuse, declaring that no one *on earth* can reveal such hidden information. They got that right at least.

Daniel is called before the king. Daniel tells the king his dream about the huge and terrifyingly brilliant statue with a head of gold, chest of silver, thighs of bronze, then iron, then iron mixed with clay. Each of these are symbols of earthly kingdoms, earthly authority, all of which are smashed by a single stone. They are broken into pieces and disappear entirely before the stone, "which became a great mountain and filled the whole earth ... and shall last forever." This interpretation has divine, not human authority behind it, as Daniel explains: "The great God has informed the king what shall be hereafter. The dream is certain, and its interpretation trustworthy." Later, in the 5th century, Augustine notes that Daniel's seemingly absurd prophecy has been fulfilled. Worship of the Greek and Roman gods had been destroyed.

Luke

In the Gospel passage, when people around Jesus are admiring the beautiful stones of the temple, Jesus treats their admiration of a man made object as if they are worshipping it. It has become a kind of statue built by a king who wants to be worshipped. In that case it is Herod. We listen astounded to the Lord's severe warning: "The days will come when there will not be left a stone upon another stone that will not be thrown down."

Pope Benedict reflects that "the destruction of the temple must have come as a tremendous shock. God, who had set down his name in the temple, and thus in a mysterious way dwelt within it, had now lost his dwelling place on earth. The Old

Testament had to be read anew." His bodily death was a foretelling of that temple destruction. Like he had told them, though, the temple of his body would be raised up again in three days. Which stone is the greater one? Is it the temple cut by human hands, or is it the stone the builders rejected, the cornerstone of our faith, Jesus Christ, who is the fulfilment of history and the culmination of human destiny, who overcomes all earthly kings and authorities.

Call To Conversion

Jesus issues a warning: "Beware that you are not led astray, for many will come in my name and say, I am he, and the time is near. Do not go after them. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes and in various places famines and plagues." Well, nation is still rising against nation. Israel, as has always been the case, is fighting for its very existence. Similarly with Ukraine. Russia and the Palestinians fighting for what they believe is theirs. There has never been a time when wars, earthquakes, famines and plagues have not been a part of the picture. Jesus explains that what is important is for us to be prepared, to prepare the way of the Lord into the world and into our hearts.

During this last week of the liturgical year, we can reflect on the end, not just of one kingdom or of many, but of history itself, and how the people of God can prepare. Our human made temples and statues are vulnerable. Everything we build will pass away. The foundation stones of our own life need to be built on the hope of what is permanent and truly holy.

Nebuchadnezzar was called the king of kings, but we await the birth, once more, of the true king of kings, Jesus Christ. With Daniel, we can say, "the dream is certain, and its interpretation trustworthy."

Key Passages

Entrance Antiphon: *Turn your ear, O Lord, and answer me. Save the servant who trusts in you, for I cry to you all the day long.*

Collect: *O God, grant your people to love what you command and to desire what you promise, that our hearts may be fixed on that place where true gladness is found.*

Daniel: *King Nebuchadnezzar summoned the sages of Babylon and said, "I have had such a dream that my spirit is troubled. Tell me the dream, and I shall know that you can give me its interpretation." They answered, "There is no one on earth who can reveal what the king demands." But Daniel answered the king, "There was a frightening statue. The head was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its middle and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. As you looked, a stone was cut out, not by human hands, and it struck the statue on its feet and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were all broken in pieces. But the stone became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. You, O king, the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, the might, and the glory, into whose hand he has given human beings, you are the head of gold. After you shall arise another kingdom, and yet a third of bronze, a fourth, strong as iron. The feet of potter's clay and iron shall be a divided kingdom. And, in the days of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed. The dream is certain, and its interpretation trustworthy.*

Psalm (Daniel): *Bless the Lord, you heavens. Sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.*

Luke: *Some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God. Jesus said, "As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another. All will be thrown down." They asked him, "Teacher when will this be and what will be the sign." Jesus said, "Beware that you are not led astray; for many will come in my name and say, I am he, and the time is near. Do not go after them. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes and in various places famines and plagues. and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven.*