

A Trustworthy Prediction

Homily for November 18, 2018

33rd Sunday of Ordinary Time

Thomas Watson, chairman of IBM, in 1943 said, "I think there is a world market for maybe five computers."

Popular Mechanics magazine in 1949 made this prediction: "Where a computer today is s equipped with 18,000 vacuum tubes and weighs 30 tons, computers in the future may have only 1,000 vacuum tubes and weigh only 1.5 tons."

Inventor Lee DeForest claimed that: "While theoretically and technically television may be feasible, commercially and financially it is an impossibility."

The Decca Recording Co. made a big mistake when they made this prediction: "We don't like their sound, and guitar music is on the way out." That was their prediction in 1962 concerning a four lads form Liverpool. Their band was called the Beatles.

As the disciples walked out of the Temple in Jerusalem Jesus paused, looked back at the Temple and predicted, "Do you see all these great buildings. Not one stone will be left on another." To the disciples this was bedrock. Nothing could bring down these walls. "Look, teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!" they said to Jesus.

Forty years later the prediction came true. In 70 AD the Temple was destroyed by Rome at the climax of the four year Roman-Jewish War. Our Gospel reading for today picks up on the conversation Jesus was having with the Apostles in Mark 13.

This is what you need to know about the Jerusalem Temple. It was actually constructed to represent the universe. It was little universe, with the Temple itself representing the Earth, the Bronze Sea representing the ocean, the inside of the Temple was depicted like the heavens. On the curtain outside the Temple they had the zodiac, like all the stars in the sky. For the Temple to be destroyed was a symbolic destruction of the universe itself.

Consider the year 69 AD. One Roman Emperor succeeded another – four in all. Nero, Otho, Vitellius and Vespasian. As Vespasian made his way to Rome to receive the Royal Crown, his adopted Son, Titus entered Jerusalem, burnt the Temple, destroyed the city and crucified thousands of Jews. By the way, Titus became Emperor after Vespasian.



This telling photo represents the consequence of the Temple's Destruction. The Roman Coliseum was built in 7 years by Jewish slave labour and paid for by the spoils from the Temple. The arch in the foreground is called the Arch of Titus, erected in 81 AD to commemorate Titus' military victory 11 years earlier.

Therefore when the Temple fell it was the end of the world for the Jewish people. What kind of language could be used to describe such a year?

²⁴ ***"But in those days, after that suffering,
the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light,
²⁵and the stars will be falling from heaven,
and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.***

The Temple's destruction was for the Jewish people not only an earth shattering but heaven shaking event. And here, 40 years before the fact, Jesus predicts this will happen in poetic-like language. Then he says something very cryptic:

Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory.

This is a difficult text and requires some unpacking. The Son of Man coming in the clouds is a reference to the Old Testament prophet Daniel. In Daniel 7 are presented the kingdoms of the world opposing God's rule and reign. The opposing kingdoms are depicted as different kinds of beasts. We are then taken into heaven where the Ancient of Days, God the Father, is seated upon his throne. Then we read:

***I saw in the night visions,
and behold, with the clouds of heaven
there came one like a son of man, †
and he came to the Ancient of Days
and was presented before him.***

*¹⁴ And to him was given dominion
and glory and kingdom,
that all peoples, nations, and languages
should serve him;
his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
which shall not pass away,
and his kingdom one
that shall not be destroyed. ¹*

Notice the language. The person presented here is “one like a son of Man”. He is given world-wide dominion in which all people will serve him and his kingdom will last eternally. Listen again to Jesus in Mark:

Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in clouds’ with great power and glory.

Jesus is associating himself with the figure in Daniel 7 and one of the consequences of the Temple’s Destruction the Kingdom of God will expand in such a way to fulfill Daniel’s Vision.

²⁷ Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

Who are the elect? They are the ones who will be gathered from all people, nations and languages who will serve Jesus. Remember Daniel’s words?

all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him

Then Jesus uses an object lesson:

From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. ²⁹ So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates.

Jesus associates the tender figs as a sign that summer is close at hand in Jerusalem. So he says when these terrible things are happening to the Temple the vision of Daniel 7 is being fulfilled. When one world is collapsing another, says Jesus is arising, and surprisingly it’s not the Roman world but the one associated with the Son of Man. For Jesus concludes:

³⁰ Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. ³¹ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

His words will not pass away because his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

As we think about this passage and its predictive character what does it have to say to us? We are among those who have been gathered from the ends of the earth into his eternal kingdom. His is

¹ [*The Holy Bible*](#). (2006). (Revised Standard Version; Second Catholic Edition, Da 7:13–14). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

a kingdom where the one who is the Word Made Flesh, as St. John, tells us, has left us words that have lasting value. Unlike the predictions made about computers, TVS and the Beatles, made 50/60 years ago, Jesus is a trustworthy prediction whose words will not pass away.

They are words that for 2000 years the Church has preserved and at every Mass reads with a particular reverence. They are words that form the bedrock of our faith. For as Jesus was able to predict the destruction of the Temple, and thereby showed how reliable were his words then, so too with every word he speaks in the Gospel. We can put our faith in them and sing with the psalmist.

***⁸I keep the LORD always before me;
because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.
⁹Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices;
my body also rests secure.***

Such grateful confidence also brings to mind that for each of us there awaits a judgement that is sobering and hopeful. How we respond to this judgment is closely related to how we will respond to Jesus' words. This judgment is expressed in these words from another portion of Daniel, chapter 12 – our first reading:

Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. ³

God desires all to be among those who will awake to everlasting life, but we have a say on which side we will fall – everlasting life or everlasting contempt. The wise are those who live their lives attentive to the words of Jesus and apply them to life daily. Then rather than the predictive language of catastrophe applying to us, where the moon will not give light and the stars will fall from the heaven – we can hear the predictive and hope filled language of glory:

Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

Let us listen to Jesus whose words are trustworthy and His predictions come true and find ourselves like those stars that will shine forever.