

Homily for November 28th 2018

As we mark the last week of the Liturgical Year our readings also focus on endings. Daniel focuses on the end of political and earthly Kingdoms and Luke focuses on the end of Temple worship. What do these passages have to say to us?

The reading from Daniel has to do with the unfolding of world history and endings, and the coming of a kingdom that “shall stand forever”

The dream of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 2 involves a sequence. A gargantuan metallic statue is pictured in four parts, evidently arranged in descending order of excellence: its head is gold, its upper torso is silver, its lower torso is bronze, and its legs are iron with feet partly of clay. This statue is struck at its very weakest point, its terra cotta feet, by a stone cut out by no human hand. The statue is smashed and carried away, and the stone which destroys it becomes a mountain which fills the whole earth.

It is understood that this statue represented four successive kingdoms of the Middle East. The image represents earthly fading power.

The object of this dream is to show the transient nature of human power which, no matter how excellent and majestic it may be, falls before the overweening power of the God of heaven whose kingdom the stone is. No veneration is due to a power that is transient, like an earthly kingdom.

Not only was the veneration of earthly kingdoms to be dissuaded, so too when it came to earthly buildings, even ones as glorious as the Jerusalem Temple, dedicated to the glory of God. Jesus foreshadowed the Temple’s destruction in 70 AD when not one stone would be left standing on another.

How hard it can be for us to see the world from this perspective. When they are dominant, the kingdoms of this world seem invincible. Buildings of beauty and grandeur seem so permanent compared with yours and my transitory and seemingly brief life.

And yet as Jesus states so clearly:

“Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; 11 there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and plagues; and there will be dreadful portents and great signs from heaven.”

Such is the record of human history and so what do we make of all this? What does it have to say to us? In a world that is in some ways so permanent and so unpredictable we are to pray for an increase of the virtues that are called theological. They are “faith, hope and charity”. In our Collect at the outset of Mass we pray that there will be an increase in all three.

We need faith because it is only by faith that we truly can believe all the Bible teaches about who we are and what we are here for. We need hope, because in a world like this we need an

increase in that virtue that has us look forward to our full participation in the Kingdom that will never be destroyed. We need an increase in love because it is this virtue that will fully characterized God's Kingdom and is the virtue most evident in those who pray" Thy Kingdom Come".

The more we learn to live this way the more we realize there are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations - these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub and exploit - immortal horrors or everlasting splendors.

May we come to ever more show in our treatment of each other, the dignity due to those who will outlast kingdoms, and buildings of grandeur. For we are all of greater value and worth than are they.