

Homily for November 14th 2021

33rd Sunday of Ordinary Time

We won't be your prey

On Thursday last we celebrated the Feast Day of St Martin of Tours. St Martin lived from 316 to 397. He was a bishop who provided an example of what it means to be a good pastor, and successor of the apostles. He founded monasteries, educated clergy, and ministered to the poor and was a gifted preacher. A friend of his, a priest by the name of Sulpicius Severus was present when St. Martin died. He recorded the last words of St Martin. “The devil”, Sulpicius writes, “was standing near. St. Martin said to the devil: “Why do you stand there you blood thirsty brute. Murderer, you will not have me for your prey. Abraham is welcoming me into his embrace”. Sulpicius concluded: Martin gave up his spirit to heaven. Filled with joy, Martin was welcomed by Abraham. Thus he left this life a poor and lowly man and entered heaven rich in God’s favour”.

I have started with this story because he captures something central to the Christian life. In this world, the devil will, to the end, want us for his own. We however belong to Christ, and with St. Martin we can resist the enemy’s attack by daily affirming that we will not be the devil’s prey, but pray that by the grace of Jesus we will be rich in God’s favour.

In our reading from Daniel, we are brought into a story that has unfolded throughout chapter 11. Today’s reading is at the beginning of chapter 12. In chapter 11 there is a detailed description of the political upheaval that will engulf the Holy Land for hundreds of years, culminating in the 12 year rule of one Antiochus Epiphanes who desecrated the Jerusalem Temple, sacrificed swine on the altar as he set up an altar to the God Zeus in the Holy of Holies. He also threatened and terrified many Jews to renounce the faith and adopt the cultural practises of the Greeks. Antiochus was definitely the pawn of the devil and many became his prey. Through these years thousands of Jews were brutally killed – those who opposed the Antiochus, and even those who sympathized with him.

This is the context for the words that were proclaimed this morning:

“At that time Michael, the great prince, the protector of your people, shall arise. There shall be a time of anguish, such as has never occurred since nations first came into existence.”¹

The Michael referred to here is the archangel whose name means “Who is like God?” Antiochus Epiphanes, like the devil himself declared “I am” and will strive to usurp God’s place. But notice what comes next. The archangel will arise during this time of great anguish – he is the archangel entrusted with the protection of the Jewish people. With his coming, there will be an

¹ [The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version](#). (1989). (Da 12:1). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

intensification of the anguish but will result ultimately in the deliverance of the people of God. Next we read:

But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book.

The deliverance is one that is beyond the grave, as with St. Martin who was delivered at the time of death. We know this to be so because reference is made to those who sleep in the dust of the earth in the next verse.

² Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

While in this world justice may be very elusive and the likes of despots named Antiochus – and so many others never face an accounting, this is not ultimately so. There are those who will awake to the judgment of God and experience eternal separation from him, while there are those who will awake to everlasting life.

What this text conveys to us that in this world there is always a battle for our souls that does not just apply to those who do evil on a mass scale, but to each one of us as well. Every day how we live will influence the final destiny we will receive. St Martin can inspire us to consider how to live godly lives. Just before he died he had gone to a one of the communities under his episcopal care where the clergy in the Church were quarrelling. Of this visit Sulpicius writes:

Although Martin knew that his days on earth were few, he did not refuse to undertake the journey for such a purpose, for he believed that he would bring his virtuous life to a good end if by his efforts peace was restored in the church.

Notice what St Martin was doing, he was going to one of his communities to seek to restore peace where there was currently division. This was the pattern of a man who daily lived virtuously in the way he loved and cared for others. With this picture in mind listen to the last verse from today's reading from Daniel:

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.

St Martin was a wise man, whose life was governed by the will of God and led many to righteousness. Similarly at the time of Antiochus Epiphanes there was a man named Judas Maccabeus - and his family - who lived holy and courageous lives during a time rife with evil. It is the Maccabeus clan Daniel is referring to especially when he writes of those who will lead many to righteousness. Such people will, in heaven shine like the brightness of the sky, and stars forever and ever.

In our time we to have a choice as to how we will live. We all face trials and anguish which are the reality of what it is to live in the world. There will be those who make the headlines who choose the ways contrary to the purposes of God and will influence many and lead them astray. However, when we have the faith to see that in this time we can grow in the wisdom of God so that with those we have considered today lead many to righteousness, life can be infused with

meaning and direction. We know that while the enemy wants have us for his prey, with St. Martin will fight back and live genuine lives of deepening holiness and stick it to the devil and declare: “Why do you stand there you blood thirsty brute. Murderer, you will not have me for your prey”