

THIRTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

LECTONARY #158

READING I Daniel 12:1-3

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Daniel

In those days, I, Daniel,

heard this word of the Lord:

“At that time there shall arise

Michael, the great prince,

guardian of your people;

it shall be a time unsurpassed in distress

since nations began until that time.

At that time your people shall escape,

everyone who is found written in the book.

“Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake;

some shall live forever,

others shall be an everlasting horror and disgrace.

“But the wise shall shine brightly

like the splendor of the firmament,

and those who lead the many to justice

shall be like the stars forever.”

This apocalyptic reading repeats “at that time.” No need to increase the volume on the repetition.

Notice how this passage uses highly descriptive language to describe the time of judgement.

In contrast to “unsurpassed in distress” and “everlasting horror and disgrace,” the reading ends on a joyful note.

READING I

In today's first reading, we hear of God's justice and the reward of those who remain faithful to him. The apocalyptic imagery and language of Daniel appear again in the Book of Revelation. The term “apocalypse” is not synonymous with doom and gloom and the destruction of the world, although the end of this world is often described in apocalyptic. In reality, “apocalypse” refers to the unveiling of heavenly mysteries, especially as they pertain to human history. The imagery and symbolism utilized are a code

understood by insiders but remain incomprehensible to those who persecute them. In this passage, we find one of the first references to Michael, Israel's guardian, in the Bible. His presence in the midst of persecution brings solace and hope to God's people. The book referred to here is likely the “book of truth” in Daniel 10:21, in which future events are recorded.

Today's reading also contains one of the few Old Testament references to the resurrection of the dead as well as the final judgment and the afterlife. The concept of resurrection here is not exactly the same as that found in the New Testament. It states that “many of those who sleep” will experience resurrection, which gives the impression that not everyone will be resurrected on the last day. Of those who are resurrected, some will be rewarded and others will be punished. Herein lies the hope of future divine justice. After the resurrection, injustices will be made right and the wicked will be punished. In contrast, the wise and those who lead others to justice are compared to stars in the sky, likely a reference to angels. Thus, the faithful will

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 16:5, 8, 9-10, 11 (1)

R. You are my inheritance, O Lord!
 O LORD, my allotted portion and my cup,
 you it is who hold fast my lot.
 I set the LORD ever before me;
 with him at my right hand I shall not
 be disturbed.
 Therefore my heart is glad and my soul
 rejoices,
 my body, too, abides in confidence;
 because you will not abandon my soul to the
 netherworld,
 nor will you suffer your faithful one to
 undergo corruption.
 You will show me the path to life,
 fullness of joys in your presence,
 the delights at your right hand forever.

For meditation and context:

READING II Hebrews 10:11-14, 18

A reading from the Letter to the Hebrews

Brothers and sisters:

Every priest stands daily at his ministry,

offering frequently those same sacrifices

that can never take away sins.

But this one offered one sacrifice for sins,

and took his seat forever at the right hand of God,

now he waits until his enemies are made his footstool.

For by one offering

he has made perfect forever those who are being consecrated.

Where there is forgiveness of these,

there is no longer offering for sin.

Notice the contrast between the human priest and Jesus' priestly identity.

Add a comma after "one," which is the

pronoun used for Christ. The second "one"

is numeric.

Jesus' sacrifice is complete and perfect.

be accorded glory akin to that of the angels

in heaven.

READING II

This reading from Hebrews repeats what we have

heard for the past few Sundays concerning

Jesus' priesthood. His priesthood is perfect

and permanent, which negates the need

for any future sacrifice for the forgiveness

of sins. What is new in this passage is the

reference to daily offerings. These daily

offerings were never intended for taking

away sin; however, the sacrifices consisted

of lamb and wine. Thus, the reference to

daily offerings taps into the images of lamb and wine to point to Jesus as the perfect sacrifice, the Lamb of God who spilled his blood to take away the sins of the world.

This passage views Jesus' sacrifice as the fulfillment of the Old Testament. It

refers to Psalm 110:1, which begins with

God appointing a ruler over Israel who is

both king and priest. Jesus fulfills this

psalm since he is both king and high priest.

We also see in the passage the fulfillment

of the first reading, in that wrongs are

made right after the resurrection of the

dead. With Jesus' resurrection, sins are

taken away so that we might enter into a proper relationship with God.

Continuing this focus, the last sentence of the reading alludes to Psalm 40:7,

which states that God does not want sacrifice and sin-offering but rather he wants

there to be an interior disposition that is

properly oriented toward him. Through

Jesus' perfect sacrifice, there is no need to

revert to animal sacrifices. Instead, human-

ity is consecrated and set apart for God

with hearts inscribed with the new covenant (see Jeremiah 31:33-34) ratified by

Jesus' blood. As such, Christians now join

GOSPEL Mark 13:24-32

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark

Jesus said to his disciples:
 "In those days after that tribulation
 the sun will be darkened,
 and the moon will not give its light,
 and the stars will be falling from the sky,
 and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.
 "And then they will see the 'Son of Man coming in the clouds'
 with great power and glory,
 and then he will send out the angels
 and gather his elect from the four winds,
 from the end of the earth to the end of the sky.
 "Learn a lesson from the fig tree.
 When its branch becomes tender and sprouts leaves,
 you know that summer is near.
 In the same way, when you see these things happening,
 know that he is near, at the gates.
 Amen, I say to you,
 this generation will not pass away
 until all these things have taken place.
 Heaven and earth will pass away,
 but my words will not pass away.
 "But of that day or hour, no one knows,
 neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only
 the Father."

The message is timely for us today. We must be prepared for Jesus' second coming.

Emphasize "near." Despite seeing some warning signs, the exact time will remain unknown.

Pause before beginning the parable of the fig tree.

Pause slightly before changing the tone to awe in the next section. Christ's return is majestic.

Start with a solemn tone for the cosmic occurrences.

GOSPEL

In the priestly life of their baptismal vocation, offering a "sacrifice of praise" described later in Hebrews (13:15-16).

Today's Gospel continues the theme of cosmic upheaval. Unlike the reading from Daniel, the stars here refer to creation rather than to angels. The power of the Son of Man extends to all of creation, "from the end of the earth to the end of the sky." Jesus often refers to himself as the "Son of Man," as a representative human (who redeems the rest of humanity) and as the revealer of

There are several possibilities for what brings about this cosmic upheaval. It could represent the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple that occurred in AD 70. Another interpretation sees this passage as pointing toward Jesus' passion and death on the cross when "darkness came over the whole land" (Mark 15:33). Finally, the cosmic chaos could be a result of the arrival of the end times. The "day or hour" at the end of the reading could refer to the timing of any these events. Jesus then tells his disciples to learn from the fig tree. On one level, the meaning verses that follow. One should pay attention to the signs all around so as not to be caught off guard when the day/hour arrives. On another level, it reminds the disciples of the withered fig tree cursed by Jesus in Mark 11:12-14, 20 when he found it bore no fruit. The reference to the fig tree here could be understood as a warning not to be barren like the fig tree when the day/hour comes. M.B.