

33rd Sunday of Ordinary Time

November 17, 2019

Reflection by Sister Benita Coffey, OSB

Malachi 3: 19 – 20a; 2 Thess. 3: 7 – 12; Luke 21: 5 – 19

Last week S. Pat Coughlin's reflections dealt with the history as well as the mystery of eternal life as far back as pre-Christian times. She reminded us that eternal life, which is to be our future continues to remain a mystery. She left us both a hope and challenge, when she said "we are called to live faithfully, to act lovingly, and to care for the earth regardless of what the future brings." Regardless of what the future brings!

Today's scripture readings help us to take a careful look at what the Scripture says to us about what *waiting for the kingdom* is going to be like.

The prophecy of Malachi, from 515 years before the earthly presence of Jesus, hints of a time to come when, for some, there will be fiery devastation but for the God-fearing, the healing rays from the sun of justice. Those were not the best of times. Was there warning already in these words of that prophet? What was the future going to bring?

Today's gospel passage is from Luke's narration, written about 50 years after Jesus lived. Here he is delivering one of his last exhortations before his arrest and passion. Luke was addressing the Gentile Christians of his era who quite likely anticipated the end would come in *their* lifetime. Luke describes Jesus speaking of severe hardships that would have to be endured, as they awaited the coming of the heavenly Kingdom.

Just as in Matthew's and Mark's accounts, here is a stark warning about impending tribulations. The kingdom of God would be coming in all its glory, yes, but not before countless trials. Here Jesus is not sparing words, as he describes one after another both natural events and human-caused sufferings that will surely come upon all. It won't be possible to avoid these things but knowing what to expect, being prepared, might make them endurable. "Perseverance will secure your lives", Jesus says. He talks of these awful things but softens what could be terror by promising to give wisdom and safety from personal destruction.

More than twenty centuries have passed and in each of them these realities have been experienced. Now they are proclaimed to us as we gather for this liturgy toward the end of the liturgical year. These same impending calamities are--- or will ---be coming for us. We are not meant to be terrified, but to recognize today what is happening, to remain faithful to the teaching to love; to persevere in acting justly and seeking peace. Let's look at some of these things Jesus predicted. Be they allegories or symbols or ordinary human circumstances in which we find ourselves, we must face them, consider them, and admit they are current realities.

Wars and insurrections will happen –As 2019 began, Foreign Policy magazine warned of 10 conflicts of which to be aware. They included Yemen, Ukraine, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Syria...the list goes on. But war, fighting, unrest and serious disagreement exists not only on battlefields. Opposing views brought conflict among the Bishops in their meeting in Baltimore. Harsh words

that hurt are exchanged within our families, perhaps at times in community. Little or big as they are, we are not spared battles,

There will be earthquakes – The 7th strongest earthquake in the world during 2019 was In California, near Ridgecrest. Earthquakes shake the ground and, unsettle life. Mergings of parishes in Chicago has caused people to feel unsettled. Threats of deportation of immigrants who have for decades felt secure in our country now make the ground shaky for them. Perhaps for some of us, our community's future planning can seem unsettling. Fears of my aging can be frightening for me at times...

Famine will come – On Oct. 15 a report came out of the hungriest countries in the world. They include Haiti in the western hemisphere, Afghanistan in Asia, and ever so many countries in Africa. Hunger is real. Nearer to us are the homeless in our city, who can't be sure of their next meal. And do we notice here and among our families and friends, people just hungering for a little attention or a kind word? Are there children in our city and country starving for good education?

Inevitably there will be plagues – serious diseases that are contagious, and which can be spread from one person or group to another. Last Wednesday two cases of the pneumonic plague were reported in China. But sickness of hearts and minds, too, can spread. Racism is a plague in our nation, and it on the rise overseas. Bad attitudes can spread, too, through unkind gossip.

For all of us, it seems, today's message is a needed reminder. Our time of waiting is going to have suffering and disappointment. The life of Jesus had its pain and ultimate horrific death. Earthly life has its costs, but glory awaits us. As promised, we too will share the joy of resurrection.

Do we long to be prepared, as did the people of Jesus time? Surely. And the whole of Jesus' life was about leaving that example. So simple isn't it? So very difficult in its simplicity.

It's all about being kind and loving everyone. Genuine love doesn't allow for injustice. At times we must speak up. We all have the challenge and responsibility to be (men and) women of prayer.

We know what's in the future for people of faith. We may not know just how specifically these wars and earthquakes and plagues will touch us, but they will. What matters is that we stay strong and focused, trusting in God who keeps our spirits safe even when we seem in earthly danger, hoping for the coming of the day when we will be again in the company of those who have already died, joining them in the intimate company of our God.

In the meantime, let us continue to gather together regularly around the table of Eucharist to celebrate and to be sustained, to become one with our God and with one another. And between celebrations let's live and work as true believers, talking about the teachings, living them, helping one another make a difference in the world. In this way we will find the strength to accept the inevitable calamities and to stand up strong for LOVE, the best preparation for the end, which is

the real beginning. And as today's gospel text ends, remember: "By your perseverance you will secure your lives."