

33rd Sunday C (Luke 21:5-19)

Seeing is believing! Right? Not always. Things are not always the way they seem. For example as we look at a glass of water or a pond, it seems perfectly still and motionless, but yet if we look at the water under a microscope we might see hundreds of tiny organisms swimming around in a world of activity. Things aren't always the way they seem. Look at the sky. Is it really an inverted bowl over a flat earth? Things are not always as they seem. Or see a person with a beautiful smile, surrounded by many friends, and supported by great wealth. She must be very happy and content. Right? Maybe not. That person may be isolated and lonely, fearful and anxious. Things are not always the way they seem.

Jesus knew our tendency to assume knowledge based on observation. In our Gospel for today, he cautions his followers to be aware that appearances are often deceiving. Jesus wanted to remind his disciples that their vision of reality was often a mirage. To accomplish his spiritual optometry, Jesus set his remarks in the context of the last days. It is our failure to take the long view, which often distorts our view. So Jesus extended the vision of his disciples across the expanse of time to the end of time. Only then could they see reality from God's point of view.

As Jesus walked with his friends in the Jerusalem Temple, its size and beauty impressed them. It was an architectural marvel, perhaps something like St. Peter's Basilica. King Herod spent over forty years building that temple. If ever there was a permanent building, the Jerusalem Temple was it. But Jesus said the time would come when every stone of that edifice would be thrown down. This seemed preposterous to the disciples and blasphemous to the keepers of the Temple. But today a mosque stands over the site of that temple. Herod's beautiful Temple was destroyed by the Romans just forty years after Jesus had made that prediction. We shouldn't be too impressed with the permanence of human handiwork- the tower of Babel, the unsinkable Titanic, the buildings destroyed in earthquakes around the world.

Human institutions, governments, and powers are equally transient. At the peak of their glory they seem so eternal, but they fade like autumn leaves. Our idolatry of the present may make us blind to the transience of the present. If evil seems to triumph over good, as in the crucifixion of Jesus, take courage. Love outlasts hate and life arises beyond death. Are you discouraged by the current political scene, whatever your party may be? Do you become anxious by the present poor economic market? How about the issue of capital punishment when even those not guilty are not uncommonly put to death? And the political euphemism of the "right to choose" means snuffing out incipient human life. Take heart, Jesus says. Take the long view. Time is always the enemy of falsehood. God controls the clock.

Jesus forewarned us that there might be times when our stand for righteousness will seem solitary. Even family and friends may betray you, Jesus warns. You may even lose your life at the hands of evil persons. In such times the victory and the power of evil seems complete. Don't believe it. You won't die alone, any more than you will live alone. When you take a stand for God you stand with the saints of the ages. You stand with God himself. Jesus tells us that "not a hair of your head will perish" in such a time, a metaphor for God's complete notice and companionship with you in your suffering. Your faith in God won't protect you from cancer, or hurricanes, or persecution. But it will protect you from the greatest loneliness and the greatest danger of all- separation from the God who loves us with a tremendous passion, who is passionately in love with us,

who remains with us, never to abandon us. As we gather at the Eucharist to remember, let us give thanks.

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