

Homily Notes – 33rd Sunday Ordinary Time - November 18, 2018

Scriptures: 1st Daniel 12:1-3; 2nd Hebrews 10:11-14; Gospel - Mark 13:24-32

1. Central Idea: Our subject this morning, the “last things”, the ultimate things – death, judgment, heaven and hell (See CCC 1020-1060), is very important but not talked about very much. Today I want to clarify the idea and be clear on definitions, with a few reflections on how to be prepared to go to heaven and not to hell.

2. The first reading: The final justification of the faithful. In the time before the fall of Jerusalem, Daniel's prophetic message, originally speaking to the needs and experiences of the people of Israel, deported into Babylon in the 6th Century, helpfully addressed the needs of the suffering Jewish people. Thus, today's selection from Daniel introduces the belief in the *resurrection of the dead* and makes the first mention in the Bible of ‘*everlasting life*’. Concerning “the book” in which the names of the saved see Rev 17:8; 20:12-15, 27.

3. The doctrine of the immortality of the soul. This passage demonstrates in an Old Testament sense that all have souls, who shall awake. This contrasts to certain groups who say that since death destroys the man, and man is a soul, death necessarily destroys the soul. This is the *doctrine of the annihilation of the soul* and is not Christian. Modern believers in this include Adventists and Jehovah Witnesses. We believe that the human soul is individual and immortal, immediately created by God. The soul does not die with the body, from which it is separated by death, and with which it will be reunited in the final resurrection, at which point it proceeds to its final destiny, heaven or hell (CCC 362-368, 382).

4. Jesus, the one and final sacrifice for sin. In the second reading, the author of the letter to the Hebrews consoles believers with the knowledge that Jesus, who sits forever at God's right hand, is our mediator who has offered the sacrifice for sins “once and for all”. Through his sacrifice our sins are forgiven, and we are perfected and sanctified. We want to be right with Jesus at the time of our death.

5. In Today's Gospel we find the promise of the salvation of the elect of God. Here Mark offers hope to the early Christians persecuted by the Roman Emperor Nero (d.68 –began siege of Jerusalem). Mark here reminds them of Jesus' words about his coming, glorious return to earth as judge, with great power and glory, to gather and reward his elect. Though Daniel and Mark describe frightful scenes, their accounts also remind their audience that God will ensure that **the righteous** will survive the ordeal and will find a place with Him. Through the parable of the fig tree, Jesus warns us all to read the “*signs of the time,*” and reminds us that we must be ever prepared to give an account of our lives to Jesus our judge, because we can not know “*either the day or the hour*” of our own death or of his *second coming*.

6. The development of the Apocalyptic: Mark's gospel is the shortest of the four gospels. This week's gospel text is from the thirteenth chapter of Mark which, together with Matthew 24 and Luke 21, is often called the “Little Apocalypse.” *Apocalypse* literally means *unveiling*, unveiling of what will happen in the “end times.”

The whole of Mark's thirteenth chapter is full of apocalyptic imagery and predictions borrowed from the Old Testament. Verses 24-27 are taken from images appearing in the prophecies of Joel (2:10), Isaiah (13:10 and 34:4), Daniel (7:13), Deuteronomy (30:3) and Zechariah (2:10).

Jesus skillfully weaves all these various strands into one powerful vision. The gospel of Mark was most likely written in the year 69 AD, just one year before the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem, at a time when the Romans were suppressing Jewish protests and persecuting Christians. Hence, Mark tried to strengthen their faith by quoting Jesus' predictions of the coming persecution of the faithful (13:9-13), the destruction of Jerusalem (13:2, 7-9, 14-20), the rise of the Anti-Christ (13:5-6, 21-23), the end of the world, and Christ's Second Coming (13:24-26).

7. Some basic definitions:

The Second Coming of Christ (Parousia): We believe in the Second Coming of Christ when he will judge both the living and the dead, but we resist any desire to identify the time of his coming. “but of that day or hour, no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” Catholics do not claim to know the day nor the hour but want to be prepared (CCC 988-1004).

Heaven: this is eternal life with God; communion of life and love with the Trinity and all the blessed. Heaven is the state of supreme and definitive happiness, the goal of the deepest longings of humanity (CCC 1023).

Hell: The state of being separated from God in a state of eternal punishment, reserved for those who refuse by their own free choice to believe and be converted from sin, even to the end of their lives (CCC 1033).

Death: there is death as the end of life which is death of the body (CCC 1007); there is eternal death in hell which is of the immortal soul (CCC 1861).

Judgment: There is the “particular judgment” which is the eternal retribution received by each soul at the moment of death, in accordance with that person’s faith and works. There is also the “Last Judgment” which is God’s triumph over the revolt of evil, after the final cosmic upheaval of this passing world. Preceded by the resurrection of the dead, it will coincide with the second coming of Christ in glory at the end of time, disclose publicly all good and evil, and reveal the meaning of salvation history and the providence of God by which justice has triumphed over evil (CCC 677-9, 1021, 1038).

Apocalyptic – this word means “revelation” or “unveiling” of things not previously known. Apocalyptic literature details its authors’ visions of the end times as revealed by an angel or out of body experience (Revelation of John), or the like.

Eschatology – is the branch of theology dealing with the last things, such as death and judgment, heaven and hell, immortality, etc.

Beatific Vision – the contemplation of God in heavenly glory, an ever-flowing spring of happiness, peace, and mutual communion.

10. Importance of believing in the Christian vision of Eternal Life.

Young people in our secularized, one-dimensional cultures are seeking a greater fulfillment, something eternal, the promises of something better.

If people have no sense of eternity, they can become tricked and manipulated by the promises of others for eternal blessings of the most materialistic and sensual kind.

We have to make the case for the Christian view of heaven and its fulfillment as revealed to us by Jesus.

We are in competition in the minds of many for the ultimate fulfillment.

11. How can we do this?

Our study group responded, “The role of parents is critical here.” We need to be prepared as parents to teach the eschatological and the apocalyptic dimensions of our faith in a convincing way. The role of parents and the importance of them staying married, is one of the greatest factors in our developing Christian faith.

It was observed that many parents of students our age came from a hippie age or from a time when sin, holiness, and salvation were not important subjects in their formation. Many parents were not prepared for representing supernatural truth. See my overview sheet, “Evidences for the Supernatural.”

We also need to pay attention to whom we choose for our friends. Fr. Mike Schmitz says, “Who are the three people you hang around most with? This is what you are most probably like.”

12. Problems:

Peer group. Most people adapt to the people around them. We want to fit in. Who are we hanging around? To whom should we be hanging around? Do we identify with unhelpful people rather than recognizing that we are sons and daughters of God?

Lack of real faith. Many of us may be more Christian by title than by real belief. This yields people who appear as hypocritical Christians. Furthermore, parents may be ignorant, incompetent, uncaring, or uninvolved.

13. Who we are: We are Catholics for whom our Christianity is a way of life, a way of life that does not end in death but in eternal life, forever, in the greatest joy and happiness imaginable.

We know that being Christian will never be easy. To follow in the footsteps of Christ always involves suffering and persecution of some kind.

15. Let us believe. Let us share with confidence our belief in life after death. There is more evidence for the Christian form of eternal life than in centuries. Near death experiences, out of body experiences, scientific evidence for the need for a Creator, for intelligent design. Modern day evidence for the miraculous cures by the saints for their beatification and canonization. Many documented Eucharistic miracles up to the present day. Let us believe, and learn how to defend our belief which is the most accurate and most real of all the alternatives.