

Thirty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time



As we approach the end of a calendar year, we as a Church also conclude our liturgical year before starting anew in Advent. We are in a season of darkness in the Northern Hemisphere as days get shorter and nights get longer. Amidst this darkness, our Sunday Mass Readings follow an apocalyptic tone leading up to Advent.

This Sunday's Gospel reading finds Jesus speaking 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."*

Without context, this kind of foreshadowing can be quite unsettling. For over 500 years, the Israelites were longing for a Messiah to restore their people to their proper place in the world. Many resisted the presence of Jesus even as He walked in their midst. The transformation of life presented to them did not fit their vision for salvation and recovery. As a people, they did not turn their will and lives over to the care of God.

Jesus Christ is not just a sentimental figure exposed through the stories of the New Testament. Scripture readings over the coming weeks describe a Rightful King who has and will return to resume His leadership in a world full of dark, cunning, and baffling influences.

Just as He arrived in the world amidst a great spiritual battle, Jesus seeks to take the reign of our lives and accompany us to freedom in the Kingdom of God. Last Sunday, our reflection noted that when we feel powerful, we are more likely to keep God at bay. In a pit of darkness, a ray of light can do incredible things. Over time, Jesus calls us out of the shadows of denial and into a full relationship with God and our neighbor.

Our fellowship provides an opportunity to light each other's candle, one day at a time. Sometimes we show up radiating with life and joy. At other times, we've reached the end of our rope, lost in life and desperate for a new way. One Catholic in Recovery member notes having witnessed the love of Christ face-to-face for the first time while attending a meeting amid great spiritual darkness.

We are united by our collective need for a savior. Sacramentally, our plunge into the waters of baptism reaches the depths of our darkness and is necessary for our conversion. Similarly, in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus uses the term baptism when He talks about the spiritual plunge that He will be taking with his death: “There is a baptism with which I must be baptized, and how great is my anguish until it is accomplished!” (Luke 12:50)

We find our own identity through these same baptismal waters. This can be expressed in many ways: remembering our baptismal promises when dipping our fingers in holy water, reciting the Penitential Act at the beginning of Mass, or identifying with the pain of the newcomer in a meeting. Turning our will and lives over to God’s care allows us to find purpose in the brokenness, powerlessness, and unmanageability that brought us here.

Reflection Questions

- Describe the darkness you have overcome with the help of God and 12-step recovery.
- How is Jesus leading you to find peace, freedom, and purpose?
- How do you honor your baptism and embrace its graces?

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Sunday Mass Readings this Week

First Reading: Daniel 12:1-3

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 16:5, 8, 9-10, 11

Second Reading: Hebrews 10:11-14, 18

Gospel: Mark 13:24-32