

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

November 17-18, 2018

Readings: Daniel 12:1-3; Hebrews 10:11-14, 18; Mark 13: 24-32

Despite the bright sunshine this morning, today's Gospel began on a very sober note as we approach the final two weeks of the liturgical year.

Jesus said: "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." All that we see shall pass away. More importantly, the Lord will return, he will revisit his people, and we need to be ready.

No, I have not spent much time in my priesthood thinking about the end times, even as I acknowledge that the Church in her wisdom forces us to think about it each year before Advent begins a new liturgical year. Left to our own designs, we would likely ignore the admonition, going about our merry way. But how shortsighted that would be.

When the Lord returns, he will do so to judge the earth; all the Scriptures agree on that point. True, we know neither the day nor the hour the Lord will return, and frankly I have taken great comfort in this, perhaps too much. Since I cannot know, why worry? But is that really the message we should glean from these readings? I think not.

For us priests, we too will not be spared the judgment of God, far from it. God will ask us if we loved our people selflessly enough to give them what they truly needed in their spiritual lives, not just what they wanted to hear. We will be held accountable for how we did or did not guard the flock, whether we allowed ravenous wolves to enter the fold, seeking to damage the sheep.

We will be given a severe judgment on that count and I think about this during my own prayer, much more often than you may think. I pray that I would never lead someone astray, either through bad advice in the Sacrament of Penance, or by a poor example. The stakes are high. God will judge us. He will judge us individually, and he will judge the world. For parents, he will judge with respect to how they raised their

children. There was an excellent Op Ed in the Star Tribune this past Thursday¹ in which the author shared his recollection that Sunday Mass was a non-negotiable while growing up.

He did not always like that but it formed habits that became solid. In contrast, he cites a study that teenagers spend between five and eight hours per day on a screen of some sort. Another study indicated 73% of Americans binge-watch.

When Catholics begin to distance themselves from the Church, studies show it happens early, while young teenagers. His question- where are the parents?

This is why we have these Scriptures. We all will benefit from this wake-up call; we need to be held accountable- differently according to our state in life and our areas of responsibility, but held equally accountable.

The Scriptures are replete with even stronger admonitions for those who are in positions of leadership. To those to whom more has been given, more will be expected. Rather than see this as a threat, perhaps we ought to see it is an invitation to greater communion with the Lord, to greater union with his suffering on the Cross and a greater participation in the paschal mystery of Christ.

He is inviting us to follow him on the road to Calvary, a road that is challenging and yet, knowing that the promised reward will surpass anything we could possibly dream of here and now.

¹ “One Answer to a decline in Churchgoing? Parent” by Jim Triggs, Star Tribune 15 November 2018