

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle C

Our readings today are far from warm and fuzzy readings.

We use the word “comfort food” to describe those foods or meals that make us feel good, at ease, perhaps warm and fuzzy food like meatloaf (my favorite), or roast beef and brown potatoes, spaghetti and meatballs, turkey and mashed potatoes and gravy, Campbell’s chicken noodle soup – simple foods that don’t challenge us, or you don’t have to be the iron chef to prepare and serve and enjoy.

I look for “comfort food” especially on dark and gloomy days – days that we usually experience around this time of year. We know that summer is definitely gone, bright and colorful fall days are getting fewer and far between, leaves are off the trees and in our driveways and on our lawns, nights are long and days are shorter and colder. I’ve always found it a little annoying that our readings from Scripture this time of year are far from “comfort food.” Couldn’t they have found something a little more warm and fuzzy than Malachi’s blazing oven or Jesus’ talk of war and insurrection, powerful earthquakes, famines, and persecutions? Certainly, if I were in charge of the selections, I’d make a few changes; but, I’m not.

And so, our challenge for these last two Sundays of the Liturgical year is to find the Good News in the readings the Church sets before us. We are coming to the end of our Liturgical year. The First Sunday of Advent – December 2nd this year – is actually New Year’s Day on our Church calendar.

Our Scripture readings this time of year are about the end times. They are about ultimate things, serious matter and, like the weather, they can come off dark and dreary. They are called *apocalyptic readings* – very popular at the time of Jesus and popular literature today. They are not something to be afraid of. *Apocalyptic* simply means *revealing*. They are revealing to us a new world, a new age, a new time. They are revealing God’s age, God’s time, God’s Kingdom. A time when we are leaving one place to enter a new place – leaving the old familiar world to enter a new one. And this is certainly a great and challenging time.

A child might be warm and cozy in the womb, but at a certain point the child must leave the womb. That’s certainly not an easy time for mother or child. It is filled with fear and pain, uncertainty. Birth can be a very scary, but it is essential for the child to enter the new world, our world.

Our readings today call our attention to a new age that is coming – a Messianic Age – a time that is a bit scary, confusing, even painful; a new time that will come but not without fear, uncertainty, pain; not without a giving up of the comfortable and familiar.

Jesus is standing outside the Temple, probably the most beautiful building that he was talking to have ever seen, and what does He say? “You see all this? All this will be torn down and not one stone will be left upon another.” Jesus is predicting the end of the world, as we know it, and the coming of a new age. The disciples want to know what are the signs that this is going to happen, and Jesus tells us of the trials and tribulations, or the birth pangs, of the new Messianic Age: the waves of suffering that precede new life, the foreshadowing of something good and wonderful – the age of the Messiah when God will reign in our hearts. But that age is not going to come without trial and tribulation.

Oh, we will get to the warm and fuzzy, but not without some change, some destruction of our old ways. The New Age of the Messiah is available to us all, but there needs to be some changes. Our

old world of thoughts and actions have to go; they have to give way to a new era that is coming about.

Let's look at the signs.

Jesus says, "Many will come in my name." Many false Messiahs will be around you. Do you want Jesus Christ to come when you need to get rid of the false messiahs? – the gurus, the idols, the people we submit our lives to with the hope of being happy? Christ wants to be Lord of our lives so we need to get rid of the false Messiahs in our life.

Then He says, "The coming of the Messiah will be preceded by wars and insurrections. Before Jesus can reign in our hearts, the false powers need to be defeated. Who are the Kings and Queens or Presidents – the power people - reigning over your life bossing you around, telling you how to live your life, spend your time or money? Jesus wants to be the Lord of your life so all the other Lords will have to go.

Now none of these authorities like to give up power. They will cling to power in every way they can. Taking power away from the people and things will never be easy, but it is the only way to give control over to Jesus, and to receive the freedom Jesus promises.

And the sign will be earthquakes. What is an earthquake? – it is the shaking of the ground you stand on. What are you basing your life on? What is your foundation?--- money? pleasure? power? self-esteem? the ego? It will all be shaken as you invite Christ to be the foundation of your life.

Another sign will be famine. What feeds you? Where do you draw your strength? – again, pleasure? - money? – power? – esteem? Christ wants to be food for your soul when you fast from the things that feed you now – You will experience famine. Jesus is the true source of nourishment and that fasting will bring life.

Another sign is persecution. As we shift our allegiance from those who control us to Christ, there will certainly be an internal struggle. Those who want to control us will not be happy as you move your allegiance to the freedom that comes with Christ. We see that a bit in the Church. The Spirit is definitely calling us to a new world, to a new way of seeing and being the Body of Christ. The Spirit is pushing us toward the reign of God when Jesus Christ will definitely be King.

But those with power automatically resist that change. They can't help that and so they wind up stifling the Spirit, wanting to call us back or push us back to the old ways. I think this is clear in some of the recent movements in the Church: the revival of Latin, singing the old songs, the attempt to use fear or restriction or authority as a motivating force. It is understandable; it is that age-old desire to hold on to the past, to stay with the comfortable, the tried and true, to cling to power.

The good news for all of us is that God's spirit can never be stifled, try as we may, or resist all we want. God will find a way. Jesus tells us that by patient endurance, we will save our lives.

God's reign will come about – that's the promise. Jesus Christ will be Lord of our lives and our world and our Church.

And that's the Good News!