

1 Advent A 2019 SML
MT 24:37-44

Each of the four evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, has a special purpose or reason for writing his gospel. Two years ago, the Sunday gospels were taken from Mark, who directed his message to Romans, who were very unfamiliar with Judaism and very unfamiliar with Our Blessed Lord, who were considering professing a belief in Jesus Christ, but just could not reconcile the fact that this Messiah, Jesus died on a cross. If I'm to become Christian and follow Jesus, and He died on a cross, what does that mean for me as one of His followers?

Last year, the gospels were taken from Luke, who wrote his gospel to everybody, especially Gentiles, especially to the outcasts of Jewish society, to assure them that salvation is a possibility for everyone, not just the sons of Abraham. A prime example was last Sunday's gospel of the discourse between Jesus and the good thief. The good thief was granted salvation. "Today, you will be with me in paradise," because in Our Blessed Lord says Luke, justice and mercy is for everyone.

This year, the Sunday gospels will be taken from Matthew, so in order to better understand the gospel readings for this year, it is critical to address Matthew's reason for writing his

gospel.

Matthew directed his gospel to a very Jewish audience. Stated simply, Matthew wrote to downtown Jerusalem, looking the scribes and Pharisees right between the eyes. That said, this is what the Church has learned and taught about Matthew's gospel:

1. **First**, scripture scholars have been in agreement since the time of the early Church on three points:
 - a. the gospel tradition was instituted by an apostle
 - b. the apostle was the tax collector, Matthew
 - c. the gospel was originally written in Hebrew

2. **Second**, since Matthew addressed a very Jewish audience, Matthew's portrait of Jesus is very Jewish:
 - a. Matthew, Chapter 1, verse 1: "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." Any Jewish person would be very comfortable with this book. In the first sentence, Matthew mentions David, the greatest king in Israelite history, and Abraham, their father in faith.

 - b. Matthew made heavy use of Jewish customs

 - c. Matthew very frequently referred to the Old Testament. Ten times in the first two chapters, Matthew quoted the Old Testament.

 - d. To a certain degree, Matthew patronized Jewish authority.

"The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; so practice and observe whatever they tell you."

- e. Matthew showed great respect for the *Torah*, the five books of the law, and the *Nebi Im*, the Prophets:

"Think not that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. Amen, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter, not even the smallest part of a letter will pass from the law."

And every Jewish man who read this breathed a sigh of relief, because he had memorized that law since he was knee high and knew that law like the back of his hand.

- f. Matthew's Jesus was portrayed like another Moses. For example, at the Transfiguration, when Jesus appeared in his glory before the eyes of Peter, James and John, only Matthew added the detail that Jesus' face shone like the sun. Whose face shown when he conversed with God? Moses'.

3. **Third**, Matthew is the most ordered of all the gospels. He very distinctly alternates five narratives with five sermons. Each sermon addresses a topic of concern for Matthew's Church:

- a. Matthew's famous Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus announced the requirements for entering the kingdom and the blessings that accompany them.

- b. Matthew's missionary sermon
- c. his sermon on the kingdom
- d. his sermon on the Church
- e. And finally, Matthew's sermon on eschatology: the last things – judgment, heaven, hell and purgatory.

So we begin a new Church year, a year which will give us a weekly look at the Gospel of Matthew. Contrary to what many think or feel, a period of spiritual endeavor like Lent, or in this case, Advent, is a period of great joy. It is a joy to come home. It is a joy to come back to life. It is a time when we trade the “treasures of earth, where moth and decay destroy, and thieves break in and steal,” says Matthew (MT 6:19) for the treasures of heaven, in order to be able to live, to live with all the vastness, all the depth, and all the intensity that a life lived with Our Blessed Lord entails.

- ✓ To live this life alone,
 - ✓ without Our Blessed Lord,
 - ✓ to live this life as if this is all there is
 - ✓ with nothing better at the end of it,
- is not a joy. But to understand this life as a journey:
- ✓ to love Jesus more,

- ✓ to know Him better,
- ✓ to love Him more closely,

that is a joy that is to be pursued. It is not something that is simply given to those who leisurely, and lazily wait for a life of personal relationship with Jesus to come to them.

For those who would wait for a better life of Jesus to come with no effort on their part, it will come.

- ✓ It will come in the dead of night, it will come like a man whose house was unexpectedly robbed says Matthew 24.
- ✓ It will come like the bridegroom who comes when the foolish virgins are asleep says Matthew 25.

Hence, Jesus' stay awake in today's gospel. Do something!

Matthew's checklist, beginning with:

- ✓ Noah,
- ✓ the two men in the field; one taken and the other left
- ✓ two women grinding at the mill; one taken the other left

is encouraging and eye opening:

- ✓ encouraging because Noah, the one man and the one woman are evidence that living rightly in the eyes of God is possible,
- ✓ and eye opening because Noah's generation, the other woman and the other man could have done better.

They had the same opportunities as Noah, and those who were saved, but they did not seize the opportunity. They leisurely and lazily did nothing.

Two modern day examples. After Hurricane Sandy hit, Monmouth County along the northern shore where St. Benedict resides came to a stand still. We had no power for a week. But despite this adversity, we did great work: flipped an abandoned supermarket into a hurricane relief center. And God was so very evident every step of the way. You will recall a few days after the hurricane hit, it snowed, a heavy wet snow. The roof to the abandoned supermarket sprung a leak. I'm on the phone with the owner talking about the leak, and I get a tap on the shoulder. The man behind me said, "Father, I'm a roofer. I can go up and fix the leak." "Here, talk to the owner." He came down and said, "It's patched, but there's three inches of ice on the roof and you cannot patch an icy roof. Any more leaks, and you're done." No more leaks.

A tractor trailer filled with pallets of food arrived. So glad. "Father, we need someone to unload that trailer." I had no one. Two minutes later, the football team from St. John Vianney High School arrived. "Father, what do you need?" "Unload that trailer!"

After about two weeks, we returned to normal and I returned to my normal routine. I like to weight train. And I run into one of the members who said to me, “Father, in two weeks, I didn’t miss a workout.” “Really? Because across the street in that supermarket we could have used your muscle. So you didn’t miss a workout.” Did the member do something wrong? The something he did wrong is he did nothing – nothing. Period.

More recently, I’m on the phone with a grandfather who wants his grandson (his daughter’s child) baptized and his son to be the Godfather. You know as well as I do that being a Godparent is reserved for practicing Catholics, those who make it a priority to worship Our Eucharistic Lord weekly. His family hadn’t been to Church in years. Granddad said to me, “I go to Church in my mind.” I couldn’t believe it. I felt like saying, “Well then, why don’t you just baptize the baby in your mind?” Did Granddad do something wrong? The something he did wrong is he does nothing – nothing. Period.

As I said to both my parents at the end of their lives, when they no longer could because their health got the best of them. Take great consolation, Mom, Dad, because when you could you did.

So this Advent, which is a time of joy to come home, to come back to life, a time when we trade the “treasures of earth for the treasures of heaven, in order to live with all the vastness, all the depth, and all the intensity that a life lived with Our Blessed Lord, entails. Therefore, stay awake. Do something!