

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

I was born in 1955. And when I was growing up I used to calculate how old I would be at some point in the future. In the year 2000, for example, I would be 45. As a kid I couldn't even imagine what it would be like then.

Would there be flying cars? Jet packs? Overpopulation? People were predicting a lot of different things. I didn't really know, but I was interested because I was pretty sure that I would be around to see it.

Predicting the future still happens. But now that I am 63, I have a different way of looking at it. When someone predicts, for example, that such and such will be the case in the year 2050, I do the math and think to myself, "If I am still alive then, I'll be 94. I won't be in a position to do much of anything about whatever it is that is happening. Someone else will be pushing me around in a wheelchair.

For me, there is a temptation not to care, to say to myself, "Let someone else worry about it," and then to keep doing what I'm doing now.

I don't think that's a Christian attitude, though.

In the Gospel for today, Jesus has to remind his listeners that nothing lasts forever. The people he is talking to are so impressed by the temple in Jerusalem, they assume it will last well past their lifetimes. It had been around for more than 500 years, so no one thought they would have to live without it any time soon.

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They were proud of it, and all the work that had gone into making it one of the great wonders of the world. Jesus did not need to know exactly when the temple would be no more to be able to tell them that they were putting their trust in the wrong place.

The temple was a part of this world, and so, as holy as it was, it was not going to last forever. There was coming a time when they people would have to get by without it. In fact, that time came pretty quickly. The Romans destroyed the temple within a generation of Jesus' resurrection.

But the people were designed for life everlasting. And that meant that they had to put their trust in the everlasting God, and in God alone, especially as the circumstances of life changed.

They had to be ready to let go of the things they were familiar with, things they had relied on so far, and trust that God would show them the way to stay close to him even when everything changed.

That's still the case. We cannot know the future in all its details. But we can know that it will not be like today. Some things will be better. But some things could be worse. And we have to be ready.

Being ready means being in touch with God, who has already promised to be with us always, regardless of what happens, and to stay in tune with what he is calling us to do now.

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That's the only way to get to heaven, and it's the only way that we can develop a life in this world that will reflect what heaven is like.

As young people this has to be something you practice already now, so that when it's your time to take the lead—which might come sooner than you think—you will know which way to turn.

Make a plan. How will you stay in touch with God? How will you develop a heart that knows how to listen to his call? Your plan may look different than mine, or that of your parents, but you will definitely need one, and one that works. We who have been around a while are ready and willing to help you.

This world depends on it. St. Theresa of Avila, one of the great teachers in the history of the church, once wrote,

“Christ has no body now on earth but yours; no hands but yours; no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which the compassion of Christ must look out on the world. Yours are the feet with which He is to go about doing good. Yours are the hands with which He is to bless His people.”

Being a Catholic Christian is very concrete. It means getting involved in the struggle to make things better, more closely related to what God has in mind for us. Not just for ourselves but for everyone.

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He wants the whole world to experience salvation, and we are closer to Him when we want that, too, and work for it. We can't just ignore it all.

For those of us who are older, and inclined, perhaps, to leave all the heavy lifting to the next generation, there's a saying for us, too. This one comes from St. Francis of Assisi: "Brothers and sisters, while we have time, let us do good."