

Homily for 33<sup>rd</sup> Sunday, b cycle, November 14, 2021

There are few teachers in the history of the Chosen People more admired or respected than Rabbi, Hananiah Ben Teradion, a Jew who lived in the second century of the Christian era. His story is inspiring. The Roman emperor of his day, Hadrian, issued a decree outlawing the teaching of the Torah, the Law of Moses, in the public square. The rabbi defied the emperor. He insisted on teaching the word of God regardless of the consequences. He simply viewed teaching as a mandate from God. As a man of faith, he was obedient to the Will of God.

One day, he was arrested for his disobedience and then sentenced to a horrific death. According to legend, he was wrapped in the sacred parchment, which was then set on fire. While the flames were consuming the rabbi, one of his disciples cried out, "Rabbi, please tell us what you see."

The rabbi replied, "I see the parchment burning while the letters of the law soar upward".

Since the Word is of God, it is imperishable.

In the words of the prophet Isaiah, "The grass withers, the flower wilts but the Word of our God stands forever (Is. 40:8).

In today's gospel, Jesus makes an astonishing claim. He declared, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away" Christ is the "Living Word", the "Eternal Word of God". His words are part of God, and therefore eternal.

Let us admit that few words are written down and remembered.

Each day we discard piles of newspapers and magazines and most of what is delivered in the mail goes unread.

Shakespeare's plays are still remembered four centuries after his death. But how many plays written by unknown playwrights are forgotten?

According to filmmaker Martin Scorsese, over ninety percent of the films made before 1929 are lost forever and fifty percent of films before 1950.

Over a period of time, all material things disintegrate and die.

The words of Jesus last beyond the existence of heaven and earth (the universe). They will last into eternity.

No mere human can make the claim of Jesus, only God.

In the second volume of his book "Jesus of Nazareth", Pope Benedict offers a reflection on the words of Jesus, "Heaven and earth will pass away but my words will not pass away". He writes:

"The Word—which seems almost nothing in comparison to the mighty power of the immeasurable material cosmos, like a fleeting breath against the silent grandeur of the universe—the word is more real and more lasting than the entire material world. The word is the true, dependable reality: the solid ground on which we stand, which holds firm even when the sun goes dark and the firmament disintegrates. The cosmic elements pass away; the word of Jesus is the true "firmament" beneath which we can stand and remain".

In the last one hundred years, many have attempted to stifle the word of God. In Nazi Germany, Hebrew bibles were set aflame. More recently, in 2020, bibles were burned in the city of Portland, Oregon.

In our cancel culture, bible reading is discouraged, if not forbidden in our public schools..

Christ has promised us that his word "will not pass away".

Despite all the efforts to silence the word of God, it usually results in abject failure. And the reason is simply that the Word is of God, and God is eternal.

God's word is indestructible.