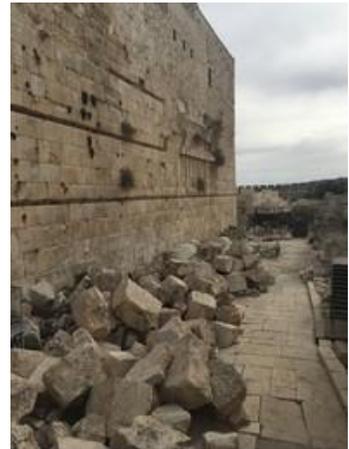


SESSION 11: SIGNS OF THE END

COMMIT - DAY 1: THE END OF THE TEMPLE

For some, the most fascinating parts of Scripture are the various apocalyptic passages—those that seem to prophesy about the end of the world. The best-known apocalyptic passages in the Bible are in the Book of Revelation (which takes its name from Greek *apokalypsis*, meaning “unveiling”). But the Synoptic Gospels contain important apocalyptic passages as well, employing much of the same language we associate with the Book of Revelation: the sun, moon, and stars going dark; wars; earthquakes; famines; tribulations; false prophets; etc. Many people read about these things in Mark 13 (and the parallel passages in Matthew 24 and Luke 21:5-36) and try to understand them in relation to the literal end of the world, but this interpretation completely misses the real topic of Jesus’s discourse.



Look up Mark 13:1-4. What is the topic that Jesus talks about and about which his disciples ask their question?

Roman street, Temple destruction

We know exactly what Jesus is talking about when he starts using apocalyptic language because he is responding to the Apostles’ question about when the Temple will be destroyed (see Mark 13:4). Even without considering the context of their question, it is clear that Jesus is not talking about the literal end of the world because he gives them instructions for avoiding the coming destructions that assume the world will continue to exist. What good would it do to flee to the mountains if the whole world were going to be destroyed? And what difference would it make for space and time to come to an end in summer rather than in winter?

The language Jesus uses in Mark 13 would not have been completely new to the disciples. Several of the prophets used these images before. These prophets are not talking about the end of the world, rather they are talking about the end of specific kings and empires. Read Isaiah 13:1-22 and Ezekiel 32:1-8 and compare to Mark 13:1-27. What images and ideas does Jesus pull from these Old Testament passages?

Isaiah’s prophecy announces that time is up for Babylon, and Ezekiel foretells the downfall of Egypt—two of the great and powerful enemies of God’s people. These kingdoms oppressed God’s Chosen People and desecrated and destroyed his holy Temple. As a result, the prophets foretell that God will no vindicate his people and bring his judgment against their enemies. In echoing the prophets’ language, Jesus is announcing something very similar. God will again vindicate the people of his covenant and bring his judgment against those who have rejected him and sinned against his holy Temple and persecuted his chosen ones. But this time the recipient of God’s just wrath is not Babylon, or even Rome, it is Jerusalem. Time is up for Jerusalem, for the Temple, and for the Jewish leaders who have rejected Jesus and his New Covenant, thereby setting themselves in opposition to God and his Chosen People.

“But of that day or that hour no one knows”

The hour that Jesus warns about in Mark 13:32 is not only the physical destruction of the Jerusalem Temple (although that is the event which will be preceded by the signs he has described) but also mysteriously the hour of his Passion and the day of his coming in glory at the end of time. But what are we to make of Jesus’s strange statement that not even the Son knows this hour? Jesus is fully God and fully man, and this means that he has both infinite divine knowledge and limited human knowledge. The *Catechism* explains that Jesus’s human knowledge was limited to what he was sent to reveal, and it was not part of his mission to reveal the exact time of the destruction of the Temple, nor of his return in glory (see CCC, 472-473)... by saying that he himself does not know the hour, he is reminding us that, as man, the Son has to practice prayerful vigilance as well-as we will him doing in Gethsemane in the next chapter.

Although Mark 13 is not a coded timeline to signal the end of the world, it does have an important lesson for us as we await that day and that hour. Jesus’s warning about watchfulness does not only apply to the generation who would need to escape from Jerusalem before its destruction-it applies to us as well. We must keep watch over ourselves lest we fall into temptation, and we must be vigilant in faithfulness so that we will be prepared when our Master returns for us, whether that happens at our own unknown hour of death or at his Second Coming in glory.

Jesus says, “What I say to you I say to all: Watch.” How can you obey this command to be watchful?

“In Jesus ‘the Kingdom of God is at hand.’ He calls his hearers to conversion and faith, but also to watchfulness. In prayer, the disciple keep watch, attentive to Him Who Is and Him Who Comes, in memory of his first coming in the lowliness of the flesh, and in the hope of his second coming in glory. In communion with their Master, the disciples’ prayer is a battle; only by keeping watch in prayer can one avoid falling into temptation.”
CCC,2612

COMMIT - DAY 2: JESUS AS THE NEW TEMPLE

Jesus’s prophecy about the destruction of the Temple grabs our attention with its apocalyptic images and warnings. But the seemingly small detail of where Jesus is when he speaks these words points to an even deeper meaning in his message. When Mark tells us that Jesus left the Temple and went to sit on the Mount of Olives in Mark 13:1-3, he is echoing an ominous passage from the prophet Ezekiel.

Ezekiel was a priest who was taken from Jerusalem into exile in Babylon in 597 BC, ten years before the destruction of the Temple. God used Ezekiel to warn the Jews already in captivity about the wickedness of those who had remained in Jerusalem and the coming destruction, but also to encourage them in faithfulness and give a promise of restoration. In Ezekiel 8-11 God shows the prophet visions of the idolatry and abominations being carried out in Jerusalem, and Ezekiel witnesses the glory of the Lord moving from the inner parts of the Temple to the eastern gate and departing the Temple to the eastern gate and departing the Temple to go stand on “the mountain which is on the east side of the city” – the Mount of Olives (see Ezekiel 11:23).

Ezekiel witnessed the glory of the Temple prior to its destruction by the Babylonians. Mark narrates for us the glory of the Lord, incarnate in Jesus, leaving the Temple by the same route and prophesying a second destruction. But this time the Jerusalem Temple will not be rebuilt because it has been replaced. Jesus himself is the new and perfect Temple, fulfilling and replacing the physical building.

Consider what you have learned about the Temple. What did the Temple mean to the Jews? How does Jesus fulfil those purposes even more perfectly?

Jesus is both like and unlike the old Temple. Everything that the Temple in Jerusalem meant to the Jews is fulfilled in Christ, but he is even greater and more glorious. Even in the false accusations against Jesus at his hurried and secretive trial before the Sanhedrin, the truth comes out that Jesus is not only replacing, but superseding, the old Temple.

Mark tells us that false witnesses claim they heard Jesus say, "I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands" (see Mark 14:58; compare to Jesus's actual statement in John 2:19).

The scandal of Jesus's alleged statement is not merely the destruction of the Temple-as horrifying as that would be to the Jews-but also that he will build a new one "not made with hands." In the Old Testament, the phrase "made with hands" is often used to describe the idols that lure Israel away from the Lord. To imply that the Jerusalem Temple was "made with hands" would be to essentially call it an idol rather than the true place of worship. The witnesses are lying, but they unwittingly acknowledge the truth that the Temple in Jerusalem has been turned into a type of idol and placed in competition with the true Temple-God himself, Jesus Christ.

In contrast, the new Temple is "not made with hands." John tells us that this new Temple is Jesus's body. The phrase "not made with hands" also echoes a dream that the prophet Daniel interprets for King Nebuchadnezzar at Babylon in Daniel 2.

Look up Daniel 2:31-45. What in Nebuchadnezzar's dream is not made by human hands?

Uncut stones are used for altars (see Exodus 20:25). The altar stone of Nebuchadnezzar's dream grows into a mountain that overshadows the whole world is "the mountain of the house of the Lord" (Isaiah 2:2). But the uncut stone is also clearly a reference to the Messiah, who will crush the pagan nations oppressing Israel and free his people.

At the accusations of the Jews, the Roman will destroy the temple of Jesus's body, but after three days he will raise it up again in the Resurrection. In his Passion, Jesus is both the sacrificial victim and the eternal high priest (see John 1:29 and Hebrews 4:14-5:10; 9:23-10:18). But he is also the Temple and the altar, the place of sacrifice. In him we are able to approach the presence of God to offer a sacrifice that is pleasing and efficacious.

Consider the following quote from Father de la Taille. How does the understanding of Jesus as Temple and Altar affect your own life of prayer?

"Those who desire to offer sacrifices to God, had to do so necessarily through an altar. But Christ, the Victim of salvation, approached to God through Himself. Hence He was also the altar of His own sacrifice. For us too in like manner, He is the altar of every one of our sacrifices, for we can bring no offering to God except through Christ."

-Maurice de la Taille, SJ, The Mystery of Faith, Chapter 5, §2

COMMIT - DAY 3: LECTIO: A BEAUTIFUL THING

When the Pharisees and Herodians try to trap Jesus with a question about paying taxes, he not only evades their trap but completely amazes them with his response. A prayerful examination of Jesus's words reveals not merely a wise response to an insidious question, but a profound-and challenging- invitation to each one of us.

LECTIO: The practice of praying with Scripture begins with an active and close reading of the Scripture passage. Read the verse below and then answer the questions to take a closer look at some of the details of the passage.

“And while he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of ointment of pure nard, very costly, and she broke the jar and poure it over his head. But there were some who said to themselves indignantly, ‘Why was the ointment thus waster? For this ointment might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and given to the poor.’ And they reproached her. But Jesus said, ‘Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you will, you can do good to them; but you will not always have me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burying. Ad truly, I say to you, wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her.”

-Mark 14:3-9

How does Mark describe the woman's gift?

What objection do some others make against her gift? How does Jesus describe her act?

What does Jesus say is the true purpose of this act?

MEDITATIO: *Lectio*, a close reading and rereading is followed by *meditation*, a time to reflect on the Scripture passage and to ponder the reasons for particular events, descriptions, details, phrases, and even echoes from other Scripture passages that were noticed during *lectio*. Take some time now to meditate on the above verse.

For they were grieved at the waste of ointment, which might be sold for a large sum and given to the poor. This however ought not to have been, for it was right that it should be poured over the head of Christ, with a holy and fitting stream; wherefore it goes on, she hath wrought a good work on me. And so effectual is the praise of this good work, that it ought to excite all of us to fill the head of the Lord with sweet smelling and rich offerings, that of us it may be said that we have done a good work over the head of the Lord. For we always have with us, as long as we remain in this life, the poor who have need of the care of those who have made progress in the word, and are enriched in the wisdom of God; they are not however able always day and night to have with them the Son of God, that is, the Word and Wisdom of God. For it goes on; For ye have the poor always with you, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good; but me ye have not always.

-Origen, quoted in Saint Thomas Aquinas's *Catena Aurea*

The ointment cost more than three hundred denarii, the equivalent of three hundred days' wages. What does such an extravagant gift tell us about this woman's faith?

The word "pure" in Greek, *pistikés*, has the same root as the word "faith," *pistis*. Some of the Church Fathers saw the "pure" nard as spiritually corresponding to the woman's faithfulness to Christ. What gift of faithfulness can you give to God in imitation of the anointing at Bethany?

ORATIO, CONTEMPLATIO, RESOLUTIO: Having read and meditates on today's Scripture passage, take some time to pray – bringing your thoughts to God (*oratio*) – and to be receptive to God's grace in silence (*contemplation*). Then end your prayer by making a simple concrete resolution (*resolution*) to respond to God's prompting of you heart in today's prayer.

"What you are doing I cannot do, what I'm doing you cannot do, but together we are doing something beautiful for God, and this is the greatness of God's love for us-to give us the opportunity to become holy through the works of love that we do because holiness is not the luxury of the few... You must put your love for God in a living action."

-Saint Teresa of Calcutta, *Where There Is Love There Is God*

COMMIT – DAY 4: THE LAST SUPPER



The Last Supper by Juan de Juanes

At every Mass, right before the bread and wine are consecrated and become the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of our Lord, we hear the account of the first Eucharist. The institution of this “Sacrament of sacraments” (CCC, 1211) was the final thing Jesus needed to accomplish before allowing himself to be handed over and entering into his Passion.

Saint Mark tells us that Judas had already arranged to betray Jesus (see Mark 14:10-11), so Jesus takes precautions to ensure that his Passover meal with his disciples will not be interrupted. Jesus sends two disciples to make preparations for the meal without revealing the location to anyone. Only after Peter and John have finished the preparations (see Luke 22:8) does Jesus bring the rest of the Apostles to the house where they will eat the meal; Judas has no opportunity to make arrangements to hand Jesus over before they begin the Passover.

In the midst of their meal, Jesus does something unusual. His words and actions are a surprising deviation from the Passover liturgy, but they echo something Jesus has already done in several of his miracles. Compare Mark 6:41 and Mark 8:6 with the institution of the Eucharist in Mark 14:22-24. What does Jesus do in all three accounts?

Twice in Mark’s Gospel we read about Jesus taking bread, blessing it, breaking it, and giving it to his Apostles to distribute to the crowd-and in both cases the bread is miraculously more than enough to feed the crowd. These miracles visibly demonstrate the power of Jesus’ words and actions; they prepare the Apostle to have faith that when Jesus takes, blesses, breaks, and gives bread to them saying, “This is my body,” it truly is his body, just as a few loaves really fed thousands of people.

On the night of that Last Supper,
seated with His chosen band,
He the Pascal victim eating,
first fulfills the Law’s command;
then as Food to His Apostles
gives Himself with His own hand.

Word-made Flesh, the bread of nature
by His word to Flesh He turns;
wine into His Blood He changes;
what though sense no change discerns”
Only be the heart in earnest,
faith her lesson quickly learns.

-from Pange Lingua

a Eucharistic hymn composed by Saint Thomas Aquinas;
this hymn is sung on Holy Thursday when moving the Eucharist to
the altar of repose, as well as on procession for the feast of Corpus Christi

In his repeated use of this sequence actions-taking, blessing, breaking, giving-Jesus makes them distinctively Eucharistic and distinctively his.

Read Luke 24:13-31. When do the disciples finally recognize Jesus?

In giving himself to his disciples in the Eucharist- to the Apostles at the Last Supper, to the disciples at Emmaus, and teach of us at every Mass-Jesus reveals himself as a new kind of king. When the people of Israel demanded a king 'like all the nations" (1 Samuel 8:4-5), God gave them that for which they asked. But, just as Samuel warned the people, the kings of the Gentiles and most of the kings of Israel took from their subjects-taxes, labor for building projects, men to serve in the military, and women to be their wives, concubines, and servants. Jesus, on the other hand, does not come as king to take from his subjects. Rather, he comes to give. He gives himself to us as food, and he pours out his life for us as the sacrificial victim for our sins. His Kingship already looks different at the Last Supper, and it will look radically different the next day as he mounts the throne of the Cross.

"Now Christ has communicated this royal power to His disciples that they might be constituted in royal freedom and that by true penance and a holy life they might conquer the reign of sin in themselves. Further, He has shared this power so that serving Christ in their fellow men they might by humility and patience lead their brethren to that King for whom to serve is to reign."

-Lumen Gentium, 36

COMMIT – DAY 5: TRUTH AND BEAUTY

Christ Washing the Feet of the Disciples

Lodovico Mazzolino, 1527, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania



Lodovico Mazzolino (1480-ca. 1528) was an Italian Renaissance painter. His *Christ Washing the Feet of the Disciples* was commissioned by the duke Ercole I d'Este of Ferrara, as were many of his other works. This painting was eventually installed in the private chapel of the duke's wife. Mazzolino specialized in small scale religious paintings- *Christ Washing the Feet of the Disciples* only measures approximately 19.5 by 21 inches. In this small area, Mazzolino has placed twenty-four figures. In the foreground of the painting, Mazzolino has placed the Twelve Apostles seated in a semi-circle around Jesus. Jesus kneels on the ground in front of Saint Peter. Next to Jesus is a shallow round basin in which we see a shimmer of light reflecting off the water held therein. Within arms' reach is an ornate pitcher. We see the detail in the folds of Jesus's garment as he kneels, and in his sleeves that have been rolled part way up his forearm ahead of placing his hands in the water.

While Mark and the other Synoptic Gospels give us the details of Jesus's institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper, only the Gospel of John recounts Jesus's washing of the Apostles' feet ahead of the Passover meal.

Look up John 13:1-17. What details does Saint John describe?

Jesus approaches Peter to wash his feet. We recognize Peter with his distinctive white beard and blue and yellow garments. Peter holds out both hands toward Jesus as he objects to the Master washing a disciple's feet. We can hear Peter's words, "You shall never wash my feet" (John 13:8). Jesus's hands are extended toward Peter as he explains, "If I do not wash you, you have no part in me."

As Jesus continues his dialogue with Peter, he indicates that not all of the disciples are clean (see John 13:10-11). As we look around the semi-circle of seated Apostles, at first glance there is little to indicate which is Judas, but with a closer look we notice that the disciple on the far right has his back to us and holds what is like a money bag in his left hand. The other eleven disciples are unaware of the betrayer amongst them. But John's Gospel is clear that Jesus knows: "For he knew who was to betray him" (John 13:11).

Mazzolino has placed the Apostles in a large, open room. The open archway on the right appears to lead into other rooms of the home. Behind the Apostles are several servants bringing an additional basin and several jugs of water for Our Lord as he makes his way to each of the disciples.

Through the arch on the left, Mazzolino shows us what happens next after Jesus and the Apostles have completed their Passover meal. We see in the Garden of Gethsemane where he takes Peter, James, and John with him to pray. Mark recounts that Jesus goes a little farther from the disciples, falls to the ground and prays that, if possible, the hour might pass from him (see Mark 14:32-36). His disciples, however, cannot stay awake. Luke's Gospel adds the detail that an angel from Heaven appeared and strengthened Jesus (see Luke 22:43). Mazzolino shows us all these details in this distant view of the Garden of Gethsemane-the three disciples asleep, Jesus on his knees in prayer, and the angel approaching Jesus from Heaven.

In the foreground of Mazzolino's painting, Jesus, the Lord and Teacher, is the servant of his disciples, taking on the lowly job of washing their feet in order to give them an example of the type of priesthood and leadership they are to exercise. But with the background image of the Garden of Gethsemane, where we see the angel ministering to Jesus, we are reminded that the one serving in the foreground is truly the Son of God, God himself.

With its small size, this painting would have been perfectly placed in a private chapel, where it could be viewed up close and stir the heart of its viewer for meditation. The scene reminds us of the humility of

Our Lord, the King of kings, who is servant of all, and stirs us to reflect on how closely we imitate his humility and service in our own lives. We look at Peter's response and reflect on times that we may have wrongly tried to disregard the Lord's will. We see the Apostles gathered around Jesus with their various expressions and we reflect on how attentive we are to Jesus' words and teaching. We see Jesus's suffering in the garden and are drawn to console him and not grow tired like Peter, James, and John. Take a moment to look closely at Mazzolino's *Christ Washing the Feet of the Disciples*. What in this painting stirs your heart?

Take a moment to journal your ideas, questions, or insights about this lesson. Write down thoughts you had that may not have been mentioned in the text or discussion questions. List any personal applications you gained from the lessons. What challenged you the most in the teachings? How might you turn what you've learned into specific action?
