



Homily for 11/17/2019

33<sup>rd</sup> Sun. Ordinary Time, C

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*Jesus Is the Sun of Justice and the New Temple*

In today's readings as the liturgical year comes to a close, Mother Church asks us to think about the four last things: Death, Judgment, Heaven and Hell. About the Last Day we hear from the Prophet Malachi: "Lo, the day is coming, blazing like an oven, when all the proud and all evildoers will be stubble, and the day that is coming will set them on fire, leaving them neither root nor branch, says the LORD of hosts. But for you who fear my name, there will arise the sun of justice with its healing rays." Malachi is usually listed as the last of the prophets and therefore the last of the books of the Old Testament. This is symbolic for us in that only Christ, the true Sun of Justice can heal us when He rises from the dead and when He comes again in glory. It is His sacrifice that sets us free and lets us pass through death via the sanctuary of His flesh into heaven.

Jesus, that very Sun of Justice, speaks to us in the Gospel about these End Times too. But the context of the Gospel is important to understand the apocalyptic message. The scene is the Mount of Olives and in the foreground is the Temple in Jerusalem on top of the mountain. The temple was of course the focal point of the Jewish world because it was the place of Jewish sacrificial worship. The first Temple was meant as a permanent replacement for the mobile Tabernacle built by Moses in the desert. It had been built by King Solomon. This first Temple had been destroyed during the Babylonian Exile. The temple that Jesus and His disciples were looking at was the second Temple built after the Babylonian exile and later renovated by King Herod.

Jesus makes the prophecy that this temple, too, would be destroyed. This in fact happened 37 years after His death when the Romans completely destroyed it in the year 70 AD. But for us who believe, it could have happened any time after Jesus died on the cross, as the temple became obsolete the minute the veil inside was torn in two. We have to understand what the temple meant to the Jewish people in order to absorb what it would mean to lose it. First it was the dwelling place of God, His footstool, the place where His glory rested - in Hebrew, the "*shekinah*". Jesus is now the manifestation of God's glory as was glimpsed in the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor. Second the temple was the only place for sacrifice. It was where God had established His altar for all the sacrifices of the Old Covenant - including the ones that Joseph and Mary would offer when they presented the child Jesus in the temple. We should note that the Jewish people today don't offer animal sacrifices because there is no more temple. But the Church has picked up where the people of the Old Covenant left off, in that we offer now the one true sacrifice. Third, the temple was the place where Heaven and Earth meet. The Jewish people understood the outer temple and the First Chamber called "the Holy Place", to be a representation of earth. It was divided by a veil from the innermost chamber that represented Heaven called the "Holy of Holies". The veil was decorated with stars woven in the pattern of the constellations of the night sky. The symbolism was that God, who exists beyond the heavens, dwelt with His people here on earth and that through the mystery of His revelation and covenant, the Jewish people had access to God 'through the veil'.

This is important because when Jesus died not far from that temple on "the place of the skull" it is mentioned in all three of the synoptic Gospels that the veil in the Temple was torn down the middle. In other words, the veil between heaven and earth had been rent asunder in the death of the God-Man Jesus Christ.

Now we come back to the prophesy of Jesus as He looks down upon this Temple that is about to be destroyed. "All that you see here--the days will come when there will not be left a stone upon another stone that will not be thrown down." He is at the same time speaking about the temple in the city that will be destroyed by the Romans as well as the temple of His body on the Cross. In other words, this temple will no longer be needed



because His crucified body will be the True Temple of the Eternal Sacrifice. This is what the Catechism explains to us:

CCC 586 “Far from having been hostile to the Temple ... [Jesus] even identified himself with the Temple by presenting himself as God's definitive dwelling-place among men. Therefore, his being put to bodily death presaged the destruction of the Temple, which would manifest the dawning of a new age in the history of salvation: “The hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.””

This clear understanding comes to us in the Letter to the Hebrews Chapter 9:

“Now [even] the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly sanctuary. For a tabernacle was constructed, the outer one, in which were the lampstand, the table, and the bread of offering; this is called the Holy Place. Behind the second veil was the tabernacle called the Holy of Holies, in which were the gold altar of incense and the ark of the covenant entirely covered with gold. In it were the gold jar containing the manna, the staff of Aaron that had sprouted, and the tablets of the covenant. Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the place of expiation... With these arrangements for worship, the priests, in performing their service, go into the outer tabernacle repeatedly, but the high priest alone goes into the inner one once a year, not without blood that he offers for himself and for the sins of the people.

“But when Christ came as high priest of the good things that have come to be, passing through the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made by hands, that is, not belonging to this creation, he entered once for all into the sanctuary, not with the blood of goats and calves but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption.”

In the next Chapter the Letter goes on to say, “Therefore, brothers, since through the blood of Jesus we have confidence of entrance into the sanctuary by the new and living way he opened for us through the veil, that is, his flesh, and since we have ‘a great priest over the house of God,’ let us approach with a sincere heart and in absolute trust, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed in pure water.”

Jesus came to establish a new and everlasting covenant which would supersede the Covenants of the Old Testament. It will be made with one sacrifice, offered once for all, on the altar and temple of His very own body and which is presented to the Father in Heaven where He sits at His right hand. This is the same sacrifice that we participate in and make present every time we celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

The washing with pure water spoken of is our Baptism and the veil of his flesh and the offering of his blood is of course the Eucharist. When it comes to the “last things” then, the only way through death is through Baptism where we die and rise with Him. And the only way past the Judgment seat of God’s justice is through the offering of Christ’s Body and Blood. Thus, washed clean in Baptism and being joined bodily to Jesus through Holy Communion, we have the Way from death to life. Everything else that is earthly will fall away, even the stones of the temple in Jerusalem. This is why we say that the highest form of prayer is to pray the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Here the priest is ordained to stand in the person of Christ the head and lead the community, which is the mystical body of Christ, in the offering of the Body and Blood of Jesus to the Father. This is not simply a gathering space for people to talk about how to live in this world. This is a true temple in which Divine Worship through the Holy Sacrifice is accomplished by Christ Himself in our midst. You have an active part to play. The priest acting in the name of Christ says, “Pray, brothers and sisters, that my sacrifice



and yours may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father.” You respond, “May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands for the praise and glory of his name, for our good and the good of all his holy Church.” Jesus is your offering to God. And it is the acceptable sacrifice. Because we have encountered Him here, because we have seen the face of God and live, we have no fear of what the world will do – After all, it did its worst when it destroyed a man-made temple in Judea. But we worship in a temple not made by human hands. This is the awesome hope that is given to Christians to sustain them against the Last Day no matter what earthquake, famine, plague or persecution may come. Bolstered by this hope we are now free to love as God made us to do.