

### **Homily Sunday 33C: 17 Nov 2013: HT-W/XII-PC**

The past several years have involved me in the "brick and mortar" tasks of parochial ministry. I've come to appreciate the value of church buildings for the spiritual welfare of God's people, and I've come to understand far better than I ever wanted how much trouble goes into building and maintaining them. We require churches as a place to gather for common worship. We desire that they be beautiful and comfortable. We want a space that draws us close to God. And when churches meet these needs and aspirations, we take pride in them. When folks compliment me on our handsome old church of Holy Trinity and the lovely new church of XII Apostles, it gives me a warm feeling. So I understand how shocking Jesus' prediction of the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem must have sounded to pious Jewish ears. This edifice had taken decades to build. It was the center of Jewish worship and a symbol of Israel's rebirth. I'm sure his dire prophecy that not a stone would be left upon another contributed to his unpopularity with the religious circles in Jerusalem.

Jesus' prophecy about the temple's doom is part of a longer discourse about hard times that lie ahead. He speaks at length about impending calamities in the world at large. And then he turns to expound on tribulations which await his followers. They will be handed over, condemned, and killed. The speech is very gloomy and intimidating. In fact, the better part of it was fulfilled within the lifetime of the first Christians. The temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by Roman armies in A.D. 70. Before then, there had been false messiahs, numerous wars, and assorted natural disasters. And shortly after Jesus' death, many of his disciples found themselves persecuted for the sake of their faith.

Of course, this passage was also written for us who come afterward. The patterns established in the wake of Jesus' crucifixion repeat themselves, increasing in magnitude with the passage of time just as the Church grows in expanse in her journey through history. If we read this passage prayerfully, we discover lessons for today. Specifically, we find caution, comfort, and commission. First, Jesus cautions us of the transitory nature of all human undertakings, even endeavors so noble as building a church. Like the Jerusalem temple, many churches have been built, and many demolished, since the time of Christ. Our hearts should not get too set on these earthly shrines. Likewise, the Lord also warns us of the perilous nature of the world in which we live. His admonitions against false messiahs should dissuade us from heeding end-of-the-world alarmists who pop up now and then, promising deliverance from doomsday for those who buy into their programs, usually for a suitable price. We must accept that the world where our Lord has placed us is subject to the violent vicissitudes of history, w/ all the danger that entails for its inhabitants. And as Jesus' followers we may be put to the test by persecution, even to the point of shedding our blood in the service of the Gospel. Such troubles are part of the price of discipleship. Yet the Lord also offers us comfort amid this peril and oppression. He promises his followers wisdom to meet the challenges and ultimate deliverance from final destruction.

Moreover, in God's providential plan, the adversity we suffer becomes an occasion for evangelism. Jesus commissions us to be his witnesses, especially when put to the test for our faith. And so the moments of greatest tribulation can be transformed into opportunities to testify to Christ, and, w/ the help of his grace, to gain others for his cause from among the ranks of our enemies. May this Holy Eucharist grant us wisdom and strength to be faithful and cogent witnesses to our Savior.