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Commentary on the Gospel: "There shall not be left one stone upon another"

Gospel for the 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time (Cycle C), and commentary.

Gospel (*Lk* 21:5-19)

And as some spoke of the temple, how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings, Jesus said,

“As for these things which you see, the days will come when there shall not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown

down.” And they asked him, “Teacher, when will this be, and what will be the sign when this is about to take place?” And he said, “Take heed that you are not led astray; for many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he!’ and, ‘The time is at hand!’ Do not go after them. And when you hear of wars and tumults, do not be terrified; for this must first take place, but the end will not be at once.”

Then he said to them,

“Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences; and there will be terrors and great signs from heaven. But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name’s sake. This

will be a time for you to bear testimony. Settle it therefore in your minds, not to meditate beforehand how to answer; for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and kinsmen and friends, and some of you they will put to death; you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your lives.”

Commentary

When a visitor to Jerusalem contemplates the city today from the Mount of Olives, it is impossible not to be impressed by the size and beauty of the large esplanade on which the temple was built. Closer

up, the uncommon size and the quality of the carvings in each stone at the base of the walls continue to draw attention. Twenty centuries ago that edifice awoke the surprise of all who saw it for the first time, and was a source of pride for every pious Jew who traveled to the Holy City to adore the Lord. That imposing mass of stone seemed indestructible.

Hence Jesus' words, perhaps interrupting comments filled with admiration, were quite startling: what cosmic catastrophe was he talking about? For such an event could only happen at the end of the world. Was the end imminent?

The Master in his reply diverts their attention from the accessory details relating to the specific time of the catastrophe in order to focus on what is fundamental.

First he tells them that difficult moments will come, when deceivers

will arise who will pass themselves off as possessing messianic powers, but the true followers of Christ should not let themselves be deceived or be afraid.

“Jesus’ words are perennially relevant. He repeats to us: ‘Take heed that you are not led astray; for many will come in my name’ (v. 8). This Christian virtue of understanding is a call to discern where the Lord is, and where the evil spirit is present. Today, too, in fact there are false ‘saviours’ who attempt to replace Jesus: worldly leaders, religious gurus, even sorcerers, people who wish to attract hearts and minds to themselves, especially those of young people. Jesus warns us: ‘Do not follow them, do not follow them!’”[1]

Christians know who their true guide is and where to find the path to happiness that so many people are blindly seeking for. We have

something very valuable to offer the world: faith and God's love, which Christ enables us to share in. Saint Josemaría exclaimed: "Don't you long to shout to those young people around you: Fools, leave those worldly things that shackle the heart and very often degrade it... Leave all that and come with us in search of Love?"[2]

The effort to share Christ's teachings with those around us, although attractive and filled with hope, will also entail much suffering. Jesus warned us at the Last Supper: "A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also" (*Jn* 15:20). God permits these persecutions because he can draw a greater good out of them, since they are opportunities to bear witness to him. Our Lord assures us that we are in the loving hands of our Father God

and that “not a hair of your head will perish” (v. 18). “This is the difference between us and others who do not know God,” Saint Cyprian said, “that in misfortune they complain and murmur, while adversity does not separate us from virtue and the true faith, but strengthens us through its suffering.”[3]

Jesus’ final words are filled with hope, since they guarantee victory in the end: “By your endurance you will gain your lives” (v. 19). No matter how many persecutions and disasters arise, God’s salvific and merciful plan will be fulfilled.

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[1] Pope Francis, *Angelus*, 17 November 2013.

[2] Saint Josemaria, *The Way*, no. 790.

[3] Saint Cyprian, *De mortalitate*, 13.

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