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Commentary on the Gospel: They Will See the Son of Man

Gospel for the 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B), and commentary.

Gospel(*Mk 13:24-32*)

But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four

winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away before all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

But of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

Commentary

Jesus is speaking with his disciples on the Mount of Olives, overlooking

the Temple of Jerusalem. One of them points to its magnificence and solidity, and they are all surprised when he responds: “Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another, that will not be thrown down” (*Mk 13:2*).

His words fill them with awe. What catastrophe is he speaking about? This could only happen at the end of the world. Was the end imminent?

Jesus’ response cites the Old Testament, combining words from the Book of Daniel with others from Isaiah and Ezekiel. He makes use of apocalyptic images well known in the tradition of Israel: “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken” (*Mk 13:24-25*).

The prophecies of the ancient writers culminate in the glorious

manifestation of Christ, the long-awaited Messiah. Standing above the cataclysms of the cosmos and the twists and turns of human history, Christ is always a firm point of stability: “And then they will see the Son of man coming in clouds with great power and glory” (*Mk 13:26*).

The Master diverts their attention from incidental details, such as the specific time when the end will come, in order to focus on what is fundamental. “Christ is Lord of the cosmos and of history. In him human history and indeed all creation find their ‘recapitulation’ and transcendent fulfillment.”^[1] —

Jesus’ reply does not offer a description of exactly what will happen at the end. Rather it is an invitation to live the present time well, to be attentive, always prepared for when the Son of Man comes and

asks us to render an account of our lives.

The Master teaches us that the history of peoples and individuals has as its goal the definitive encounter with the Lord. Exactly when and how it will happen has no great interest for us, since as Jesus says provocatively: “no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father” (Mk 13:32).

He deliberately steers us away from a superficial curiosity about the future, in order to turn our attention to what is really important. He points out the right path to travel along to reach eternal life: “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away” (Mk 13:31). Everything else in life passes away, but the Word of God doesn't change, and is a stable guide to govern our behavior. Our life only makes sense and finds

stability when it is grounded on God's Word that Jesus has brought us.

In the Creed we profess that Christ "ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty; from there will he come to judge the living and the dead."

"Then," the Catechism say, "will the conduct of each one and the secrets of hearts be brought to light. Then will the culpable unbelief that counted the offer of God's grace as nothing be condemned. Our attitude to our neighbor will disclose acceptance or refusal of grace and divine love."^[2]

In the final Judgment it will become clear whether we have lived in accord with the light of God's Word, or have rejected it, placing our confidence in ourselves.

^[1] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 668.

^[2] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*,
no. 678.

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