

In today's readings, especially in the Holy Gospel of St. Luke, we find a rather terrifying vision of *what will eventually be*, and the Lord asks us to ask ourselves about the *last things*, that is, death, judgment, Heaven and hell. I would like to come at this from a little different angle this year.

To understand this Gospel, one must understand that Jesus comes out of the Temple after having made one "last ditch effort" to try to reach the scribes and Pharisees – and, for all intents and purposes, it seems that He has failed. Furthermore, just as He is leaving the Temple, He spies a widow leaving her little offering, *the widow's mite*, all that she has to live on. Our Lord's remarks are clear and uncompromising:

*I assure you, this poor widow has put in more than all the rest. They make contributions out of their surplus wealth, but she, from her want, has given what she could not afford – every penny she has to live on! (St. Luke 21. 3-4)*

After a difficult day, Jesus rests outside the Temple with His disciples.

The Temple was known for its splendourous beauty – history attests to this. Thus we read in Josephus' *The War of the Jews*:

The outward face of the Temple in its front wanted nothing that was likely to surprise either men's minds or their eyes, for it was covered all over with plates of gold or great weight, and, at the first rising of the sun, reflected back a very fiery splendour, and made those who force themselves to look upon it to turn their eyes away, just as they would have done at the sun's own rays. But the Temple appeared to strangers, when they were at a distance, like a mountain covered with snow, for, as to those parts of it that were not gilt, they were exceedingly white. (1)

The disciples, no doubt, after a day of seeming defeat, were looking at the Temple, and trying to cheer Our Lord with its beauty. Jesus' teaching is anything but cheering. This Gospel passage has been a thorn in the side of the Church since Her coming forth from the very side of Christ! Jesus says: "*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!*" (St. Luke 21. 6)

This particular passage is a very difficult one. Jesus is actually speaking about two things at the same time. Does that ever happen to you? It certainly does to me! Jesus, when He says that "*the days will come when there will not be left a stone upon another stone*" is referring, with heartbreak, to the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. by the Roman government (which He sees by way of His Divine Vision). About this destruction, Our Lord will say in another place (one can, to borrow a phrase from another author, hear the tears in the back of His voice):

*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, thou that stonest them that are sent to thee; how often would I have gathered thy children as the bird doth her brood under her wings, and thou wouldest not! (St. Luke 13. 34)*

In this invasion by the Roman government, which Jesus clearly sees and predicts with His Divine foreknowledge, not only will the Temple be completely destroyed, but the Levitical priesthood, as well, thus changing forever the character of the Jewish faith. Without the Levitical priesthood to offer sacrifice, and a Temple for the offering, Judaism will now change to become a religion solely of the Word the praise of which sounds out only in synagogue.

But this is not all. In this famous passage of St. Luke, Our Divine Lord is also warning us to take heed! A time will come – "*we know not the day nor the hour*" – when the end of the world will come. There are signs, to be sure, the signs given in this passage, and others, the return of the Jewish people to their homeland, and the

rebuilding of the Temple, among others, but still, they are signs and "*we know not the day nor the hour!*"

Of course, there are always voices, Our Lord tells us so, which say that He is coming, *now!*, *immediately!* "*See that you are not deceived... do not follow them.*" (St. Luke 21. 8) So, having said all of this, let me point out a rather obvious point (or, perhaps, a not so obvious point) and ask a question.

If the signs of fulfillment have not arrived, that is to say, if it seems that Christ's imminent return is not about to happen, just what are we to be doing in this "in-between time?" May I point out a little line in our Gospel passage today that is very powerful when one comes to truly trust the Lord and Our Lady? "*Remember, you are not to prepare your defense beforehand, for I, Myself, shall give you a wisdom in speaking that all your adversaries will be powerless to resist or refute!*" (St. Luke 21. 14) This sentence follows a rather frightening sentence, which, in fairness, I must quote:

*Before all this happens, however, they will seize and persecute you, they will hand you over to the synagogues and to the prisons, and they will have you led before kings and governors, because of My Name. It will lead to your giving testimony. (St. Luke 21. 12f)*

Now, while it is true that Jesus is speaking about the signs that will happen at the time of the Anti-Christ, it must be kept in mind as I said above, that Our Lord is speaking about two things at once in this passage. Actually He is speaking about many things at once. He is referring also to the difficulties and trepidations that accompany *any Christian* who tries to live a life of Christ. *Any man who tries to live the life of Christ in his daily life will have to embrace the Cross in some fashion* – "*If any man would follow me, let him renounce himself, take up his Cross, and follow Me!*" (St. Matthew 16. 24) Thus, in essence, we do not have to wait until the end of the world and the Anti-Christ to be persecuted in some way for living out faith well.

And if we are questioned for living our faith well, how shall we respond? Shall we be afraid? Shall we look down on those who make difficulties for us? Will we think that we are better than they? Shall we grow angry? Might we want to flee, or worse, to prevaricate?

What does it mean to prevaricate? It means to shilly-shally, to give wishy-washy answers; for example, I don't believe in abortion, but I can't legislate morality; that's all very nice, especially when I'm not the one to be aborted; it's not very nice for the one who is. This shilly-shallying also works on the euthanasia argument: all very well and good for the one who gets to live, not very good for the one who gets to die, 'mercy' notwithstanding. I take this argument very personally because, while I was still in my own mother's womb, *back in good old 1956, (the good old '50s?)*, I had a 'merciful' (?) doctor wanting me to be aborted because he thought I would be a worthless victim of a premature birth. He was trying to literally help me over a cliff.

What does Our Lord teach us about times of trial? It's maddeningly simple. So simple it makes modern people scream. It is summed up in the motto of my own patron saint, St. Gerard, the patron saint of little children, pregnant mothers, and, also, the saint of a good confession. What was his motto? *Deus providebit*, that is, 'God will provide.' Here we have a perfect summary of St. Luke 21. 14-15: "*I bid you resolve not to worry about your defense beforehand, for I will give you words and a wisdom which none of your adversaries can take exception to or contradict.*" (St. Luke 21. 14-15)

The point that I am trying to stress is that in our daily lives, we all have moments of great difficulties. And in those difficulties we are often tempted to ask ourselves: Where are You, Lord? Have You forgotten me? While its true that we might not be being dragged before judges and magistrates, I can assure you that some of us, in fact, have had that very thing done to us. Then what?

Then is the time that we need the very confidence that only God, the Lord Jesus, and His loving Mother, Mary Immaculate, can give. Here are some pointers that might prove helpful.

One: We are children of God and, through our Baptism when we are in the state of grace, the Trinity lives within us. In moments of stress or sadness, are you speaking to the Lord?

*Ask and you shall receive; seek and you shall find; knock and the door shall be opened to you. For whoever asks, receives; whoever seeks, finds; whoever knocks, is admitted. What father among you will give his son a snake if he asks for a fish, or hand him a scorpion if he asks for an egg? If you, with all your sins, know how to give your children good things, how much more will our Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him. (St. Luke 11. 9-13)*

Let's be honest. In times of trial or panic, is it possible that we forget Our Heavenly Father is dwelling within us, and begging to be asked, hoping that we will trust in Him? He *wants to prove* that His Son told us the Truth in the Sacred Page of the Scripture, doesn't He? Or do we not believe that?

Two: Because Christ wears the flesh of Mary, Our Lady is also integral to the Lord, and therefore integral to Jesus, to the Trinity, and finally, to the entire Church. We refer to this in sacred theology as *the Marian principle*. Quite a while ago I came across a beautiful image of Our Lady with a novena prayer with which I was completely unfamiliar. I found this image and novena on one of my favourite web sites, *Spiritdaily.com*. The image of Our Lady was Our Lady, Undoer of Knots., which is a favourite devotion of our Holy Father, Francis. Curious, I ordered the novena which shows a lovely picture of Our Lady, Mary Immaculate. In Her hands, quite beautiful hands with long, tapering fingers, is a long, long ribbon. The ribbon is a symbol of our lives. As Our Lady receives the ribbon from the Angels, there are many tangles and knots in the ribbon, the hurts and problems, the disasters and difficulties of our lives. Our Lady in the image receives the ribbon with all its knots and patiently, with the aid of our trust and prayers, undoes the knots in the ribbon – hence, Her title, Mary, Undoer of Knots. The first information about this novena came out in *Spiritdaily* as simply the novena itself. Recently, more history about the novena has come out in a very interesting little book (also available on *Spiritdaily*) entitled *Mary, Take Over!* In fact, the authors, Mr. and Mrs. Denis Bourgerie encourage those three little words as a most powerful prayer to Our Immaculate Mother in times of trial: Mary, take over!

Before my non-Catholic friends begin to howl about over-emphasizing Mary, let me remind you that it was at Our Lady's behest that Jesus began His ministry. Jesus, having been informed by His Mother that they had no more wine at the wedding feast at Cana responded curiously to Her: "*Woman, what is that to Thee and to Me? My hour is not yet come!*" Seemingly completely unconcerned, Our Lady simply tells the servants: "*Do whatsoever He tells you!*" (St. John 2. 4-5) One wants to ask the question, but it seems to verge on the blasphemous: Did Our Lady's prayer to Jesus actually speed up the '*divine time table*?' Of course, no. There can be no contradiction between the Woman, the New Eve, and Her Son, the New Adam. "*Blest is the womb that bore You, and the breasts that nursed You!*" To which Our Lord replied: "*Rather, blest are they who hear the word of God and keep it!*" (St. Luke 11. 27-28) Our Lady heard the Word, and, as a human Tabernacle, bore It in Her spotless womb for nine months. And as I said above, Jesus, the Word, bears Her flesh. There can be no contradiction between the Woman and the Word.

Am I going out on a limb when I say that, perhaps, the other side of St. Gerard's prayer, *Deus providebit*, or, 'God will provide,' is 'Mary, take over?' In these two short phrases, these two short prayers, we have in fact a summary of Jesus' teaching: "*Remember, you are not to prepare you defense... for I, Myself, shall give you a wisdom that all your adversaries will be powerless to resist or refuse.*" (St. Luke 21. 14-15)

In this Gospel passage which refers to both the end of an era for Judaism in that it rightly predicts the end of the Temple and the end of the Levitical priesthood, and also the end of the world, we are at the time in the Church year when we are asked to also ponder the end of our own lives, the last things, death, judgment, Heaven and hell.

We are not at that point in history, at that point in time, almost 2000 years ago, when we have to witness the heartbreak of the destruction of the Temple prophesied by Our Lord in today's Holy Gospel. Nor, does it seem, have we yet reached the moment in time when Jesus will gloriously return. I am reminded of an old, old popular song: "*In the meantime, in between time, Ain't we got fun?*" (2)

There are strong reasons to believe, especially at this tumultuous period of history, that we may be coming very close to the time of the Triumph of the Immaculate Heart which would usher in the Eucharistic Reign of Jesus. Numerous recent saints and saints of old have spoken about this. One very good source of information about this can be found in Fr. Joseph Iannuzzi's little book *The Triumph of God's Kingdom in the Millennium and End Times*. It is an excellent reference and not a difficult read. God love you!

1. William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke, The Daily Study Bible*, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1953, pgs. 269-270
2. *Ain't We Got Fun?* By Richard Whiting, Gus Kahn, Raymond S. Egan