

Remembrance Sunday 2016

Fr Michael - Malachi 4. 1-2a, Luke 21. 5-19 - 13/11/16

The book Malachi from which we heard our first reading this morning is the last book in the Old Testament and is an interesting short debate in six parts. These parts are often called 'disputations' - debates with question and answer style sections. The subjects being discussed are the complaints and fears of the people which God answers and persuades them of his trustworthiness.

The passage we heard read this morning is at the close of the final argument concerning how evildoers appear to prosper while those who do the will of God and walk in his ways see no benefit. God assures the people that on the 'day of the Lord' they will see a difference when the evildoers are destroyed and healing and life will come to those who are faithful.

If this isn't a tale which is told in every generation I don't know what is!

We have probably all been guilty of thoughts like these ourselves - why do those who work hard and try to do the right thing never seem to prosper while 'others' who are idle and even downright dishonest seem to get away with it or even do rather well?

We may first encounter this type of argument in the playground at school and they continue to pester us into adult life - who hasn't wondered why those speeding on our local roads don't seem to get caught - and the phrase 'where are the police?' when someone is driving down Mount Park Road at 50 or more miles an hour is not far from our tongues!

So if you are tempted to think like that then remember Malachi and the 'day of the Lord' when God will sort everyone out. The day of the Lord is of course the common thread between our two readings. However, in Luke not only are the end times predicted but the destruction of the Temple is foretold by Jesus. This fabulous building, one of the wonders of the known world at that time, adorned, painted, and decorated with gold would be torn down - this was unbelievable to the disciples and all first century Jews. The Temple stood for so much in the life of the nation - law, ceremony, religion, pride, social structure and cohesion, that its destruction was unthinkable. But Jesus hasn't finished there, for he tells of wars and revolutions - signs of the end times, signs that the coming of the Lord is imminent. Well, the world has witnessed many wars since the time of Jesus' words and particularly on our minds today are the two world wars and other subsequent wars when service men and women have put their lives at risk and many have lost their lives in the pursuit of freedom and a sense of what is right. Here again the discussion in Malachi surfaces in our minds - why does evil sometimes get its way? Why did innocent people suffer, why did they die? In wartime many great buildings are destroyed, as happened with the Temple and national life is changed for ever. Lives are lost and families devastated in times of war - thousands sacrifice everything for the sake of their nation and its freedom.

This is the way of the world - this loss, is the outcome when we, frail and sinful human beings take authority, but the life of Jesus and the loss of his own life shows what the world would be like if all authority was with God. The culture that prevails in the world is - "this is my home, my possessions, my money, my body and I will do with them whatever I like!" The world is obsessed with power, prestige, wealth and control. If we believe that God exists we must acknowledge that all we have is loaned to us - a gift from God - we are its stewards during our time on earth. God is in control, he is the ultimate judge, not us frail humans. God, through Jesus showed just what sacrifice is really about, in that he died that we might have life, have freedom, and have a future.

Our society is full of people who insist on their own way, on their own individual authority. It happens at the simplest levels of human interaction, and it happens at the highest levels of government, industry and commerce. Today we remember all of those people who have given their lives to prevent just that way of thinking being the prevalent mindset in our world. Wars are often about people or nations thinking that their way was right, their rights or greed or hatred mattered more than other people.

Jesus' summary of the law - loving God and our neighbour - the two great commandments are at the heart of our Christian faith, yet seem very distant when the subject of warfare is on the agenda. What a dichotomy for Christians - love your neighbour, but uphold the freedom and liberty of people; even if that requires bearing arms. I do not have the answer for you this morning - I have my own feelings and convictions - but, not an answer - we all have to decide for ourselves, our consciences are important here - searching our souls, we have to live with our own convictions and the decisions we make - it is hard, no one can take that away!

We don't know everything. as St Paul says, "Now we see in a mirror dimly, but when the end comes, "we will see face to face. now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known." The Christian dispensation, the ordering of how things are, acknowledges that we do not know, we do not have control, we are not in charge.

But, Jesus showed that death was not the end. Jesus showed that there was another way to live our lives. We can love our neighbour and we can stand up to the powers that be in this society of ours, showing that there is 'another way' to the world.

The way of truth, the way of hope, the way of love - the way of Jesus. The journey of faith is not a life lived without doubt or questions, the life of a Christian is not one without trial or hard work, and the earthly pilgrimage is not about control and power. Its about truth, hope and above all love. And all of this begins not with - "I insist," or, "I own," or, "I want," but with the simple hopeful proclamation, "I believe!"

Amen.