

November 15, 2015 Last Days Homily

Brothers and sisters, a couple of years ago a former High School classmate's only child was waked at a funeral home in Albany. At the time of his death, he was only in his early twenties and undoubtedly, given his stellar academic record, had a promising career ahead of him. Sadly, he lost a lifelong battle with drug addiction. On the day after the wake, which I attended, I called another one of my classmates who knew the father of deceased young man very well. I recall his chilling words "For our classmate, the world has ended. It is as if he died, too!" It was a grim, though understandable, reaction to a family tragedy.

What message does our gospel reading (Mk.13:24-31) offer those for whom the world has ended? Bear in mind that the Gospel of Mark was addressed to Christians, a tiny minority in the vast Roman Empire who had suffered much and were expected to suffer even more for their faith in Jesus.

In today's reading the evangelist St. Mark tells us of Jesus' last day in Jerusalem, shortly before the drama of the crucifixion. The imagery is stark and terrifying. A frightful darkening of the sun, stars falling and the heavens quaking (Mk.13:24-25). "A time unsurpassed in distress" (Dan.12:1). The tribulation spoken of in the beginning of the gospel likely refers to the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Great Temple in Jerusalem by the Romans. For many Jews, the loss of the temple was an unspeakable tragedy and one which was very much like the "end of the world".

But the reading ends on a note of triumph. Christ, in all His splendor appears in glory and vindicates those of his followers ("the elect") who have remained faithful and true even in the midst of persecution. As one scholar put it, "And at the end of time, the glorious Christ leaps forth out of the tribulations of history in order to inaugurate his definitive kingdom".

For virtually all of us, there is a miniature end of the world at one time or another. Our world seems to collapse around us. Our faith is shaken badly. Consider: a chronic or terminal illness, a broken marriage, a failed relationship, losing a job, a bankruptcy. One of the much need lessons in life is to discover that many our tribulations are temporary. Recall the waters of the great flood at the time of Noah or the 40 tormented years the Jews wandered in the desert. All things in this life are passing. Only the Eternal Word lives forever (Mk.13:31),

The recent terrorist attacks in France are a painful reminder that the lives of Christians are in jeopardy in every age. We have been informed that the terrorist targeted Christians because they were regarded as infidels and crusaders. But Christ has the last word!... "And then he will send out his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the end of the earth to the end of the sky"(Mk.13:27).

Amen!