

Thirty Third Sunday C Cycle November 16, 2025 Greenwich

“Wars and rumors of war, persecutions, the shaking of the very heavens and earth.” How can that be Good News?”

For pious Jews, the Temple was Wall Street, the White House, the Treasury and St. Peter’s in Rome, all under one roof.

The Temple was the financial center of Judaism. It was the symbol of Israel’s history and identity. Most of all, the Temple was the dwelling place of God in their midst.

So, if the Temple is reduced to rubble, without a column or a block of granite left standing, that could only mean the world’s final cataclysm.

Rabbi Jesus spoke the truth. Forty years after his death, the temple fell and a world came to an end. But those death throes were in fact birth pangs. From the rubble of the temple, God raises up a new dwelling place, fashioned not of stone, but of the lives of believers. And God’s new dwelling, the Church, will embrace the whole world.

When Jesus made these pronouncements, he knew that the temple authorities feared him, feared that he would lead the crowds to revolt and depose them; and then their worst nightmare would come real: Rome will crush the rebels, destroy the whole city, and remove those temple leaders who let things get out of control.

They will decide to kill Jesus, reasoning that “it is better for one man to die than the whole nation perish.” So, Jesus is murdered, to keep the Temple standing and its leaders secure.

Ironically, forty years later, an armed revolt killed all the priests and scribes. Rome struck back and burned the temple. Murdering Jesus, the Innocent One, did not spare the Temple authorities. Their world ended.

But not God’s world.

For the disciples of Rabbi Jesus, Crucified and Risen Messiah, the terrible destruction of Jerusalem was also a New Exodus.

Persecution forced Christians out of Palestine and Jerusalem into Samaria and Asia Minor. Now, this final blow propelled them to the ends of the known world.

Gentiles were barred from the old Temple, under the penalty of death. Now, through the destruction of the temple of Jesus’ body, and the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem, they themselves become living stones of the New Temple, the Church. This was Paul’s declaration we heard last weekend.

Jewish disciples were hauled out of synagogues and into prison, tried before governor and king; and like Jesus, by patience and trust, they too won life, for themselves and for those who came to believe because of their faithfulness to Christ.

Ironically, Caiphas was also right. It was better for one man to die. The death of that Innocent One spared the whole world from everlasting death.

In our day, we contend with fear, anxiety and despair, terrorism and war, economic distress and cultural collapse; and for many it may seem that the world as we knew it has ended.

But the Gospel summons us to Christian realism and to Christian hope.

First, realism.

Lots of times, the world has predicted the demise of the Church:

the persecutions of the Roman Empire;

the devastations of the Black Death;

three men claiming to be Pope at the same time;

the splintering of the Church, West versus East, Catholic versus Protestant, and the internecine Wars of Religion.

How could believers hold on when, in their turn, France, Italy, Germany, Mexico, Russia, China, all attempted to wipe out the Church in their lands?

What future has the Church, when it is shamed by clerical scandals, devastated by distrust between hierarchy and laity, its coffers and its pews radically reduced?

Since the days of St. Paul, there have always been those ready to pronounce us dead; yet, behold, we live.

There have always been wars and rumors of war, pestilence and famine;

persecution and martyrdom have always loomed over the community of believers.

For no servant is greater than the Master.

Jesus calls us to be his disciples, to belong to his new family of those who do the will of the Father, and so to imitate him in holiness. We can also expect to imitate Jesus in facing down the opposition and hatred of the powers of evil.

The cost of that discipleship isn't always on a cosmic scale.

We bear the burden of human living and of Christian fidelity whenever we keep praying, even though our prayer seems dry and sterile;

when we remain honest even as many cheat and lie;

when we live Christian sexual ethics of abstinence outside of marriage and fidelity in marriage, although promiscuity, pornography and adultery are national past-times.

whenever we simply trust in God's closeness and care as someone we love is suffering or dying;

when we continue to count ourselves Catholic when so many friends have left the church.

That fidelity has begun to bear great fruit. Indeed, in individual acts of heroism we have forty young people as well as three adults preparing for Confirmation, another adult, a teen and a grammar school student preparing for baptism at easter, and several more children and adults seeking admission to the Catechumenate. They all pledge deeper conversion of life as followers of Jesus Christ in the Catholic Church.

Attendance at Sunday mass is growing here, throughout the diocese and in the US. In the last two years significantly more people have come into the Church than have left.

In all these ways, we enter into the very dying and rising of Jesus, whose paschal mystery embraces and transforms the passion of the world.

And behold, we live, for we have received Good News—Christ is Rise, Christ is alive, and we with him.

And we have this faith as a gift from those who themselves endured hardships for the sake of fidelity to the Lord, who is always faithful to his people.

What we have received, what we hand on, is the living faith of the dead, not the dead faith of the living.

Haltingly, tentatively, painfully, we too have learned that patient endurance with Christ and his Church does indeed bring life.

And we've also come to know that we sustain God's gift of faith only by receiving God's other gifts, the gift of his Word and Eucharist, the gift of his very Spirit and life, dwelling here in the Church, in one another.

We are gathered here, to be nourished by the Lord and by one another. Our pilgrimage will take us through the end of this year, and into the coming one, until Jesus, who has come in the flesh and dwells amongst us in the Spirit, returns in his Glory.

For he is fitting us into the stones of his living temple, one never to be destroyed, where the Glory of God dwells forever.

Until that great day, we sustain one another, especially when our world seems to come to an end; sustain one another with the wisdom of God and the Grace of God and the love of God made visible in Christ Jesus.

And the people of God said, Amen.