

## THIRTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (Year C) - AOD RESTRUCTURING 11-16-2025 H

### I. Introduction

If you're my age, you might remember the first time Mass was said in English, instead of Latin: Sunday November 29, 1964—the First Sunday of Advent, sixty-one years ago. I was in 4th grade at the time, so I didn't really know a change was coming, but I clearly remember using the new hymnal titled *People's Mass Book* that day. It had a strange, abstract drawing of people on the front cover, and on the inside pages all the priest's parts were printed in green, with the congregation's responses in black. I was envious; I wanted the green words, since that was my favorite color (though I don't think that had anything to do with discerning my vocation to the priesthood). I felt that Mass went very quickly, but my father said, "No, it was actually longer than the Latin Mass; it just seemed faster to you because it was different."

There were a number of changes implemented in the Church in the mid-1960s following the Second Vatican Council, which ended in 1965. As a result, many Catholics were confused or upset, for they wrongly assumed that one of the signs of the True Church was that it would never change in any significant way. The expectation that things would always remain the same was never a teaching of the Church, but lots of people had that impression—and in their distress, quite a few Catholics left the Church or stopped coming to Mass. When I was a deacon, I remember the pastor of the parish where I served talking about how sometimes, when families came in for funeral arrangements, they'd say about their deceased loved one, "She didn't really practice the Faith after Vatican II," or "he stopped coming to Mass after all the changes." To this he'd respond, "And yet, one of the changes is that now we're able to have a funeral Mass for a non-practicing Catholic, unlike in the past, before Vatican II."

Change is sometimes welcome or beneficial; quite often, however, it's hard, confusing, or upsetting, and frequently it's difficult to understand or accept, even when it really is necessary or unavoidable. Jesus had promised that the gates of hell would never prevail against the Church, but He never promised His disciples would always find life easy, comfortable, and predictable. We live in an imperfect world. Life will be perfect only in Heaven—and until then, we must proceed in a spirit of humility, self-surrender, and trust.

### II. Development

The apostles were surely shocked and dismayed when Jesus announced that the Temple in Jerusalem—a source of pride and inspiration to Jews everywhere—would be completely destroyed. Such a catastrophe was unimaginable, and a change or disruption too terrible for them to accept. Jesus further spoke of frightening signs in the sky, natural disasters, wars and insurrections, and trials and persecution of His followers. However, the Lord also promised they would be given the necessary wisdom, courage, and strength to persevere and remain faithful, thereby overcoming this world's hostility. God had made a similar promise through the prophet Malachi, foretelling a day of healing and rejoicing for His people, and in the 2nd Reading St. Paul speaks of the importance of living in an orderly, diligent manner. Those who put their faith into practice don't have to worry about the challenges and misfortunes of life, for God's grace will preserve and sustain them, no matter what difficulties may arise.

### III. Conclusion - AOD Restructuring

This promise is one many of us will need to remember and cling to, for great changes and challenges are approaching. This weekend the Archdiocese of Detroit is officially announcing a major restructuring process, due primarily to the increasing age and declining numbers of priests in parish ministry, fewer priestly and religious vocations, shifting demographics, a substantial decrease over the years in the number of Catholics here in southeast Michigan attending Mass and receiving the sacraments, and the problem of having too many churches and other buildings to operate and maintain. My bulletin column today, and various on-line resources from the Archdiocese, describe this situation in more detail, along with the process—preparations for which have already begun—that will be followed over the next year-and-a-half. It's important to understand that *no final decisions* have been made yet, but in all likelihood some parishes will eventually be merged or closed, most priests will be moved or reassigned, and Mass schedules and other parish services and offerings will be affected. Schools will also be involved in a later stage of the restructuring. As Archbishop Weisenburger has stated, sacrifices will be required—but, as he also emphasizes, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, restructuring can be a spiritual opportunity, rooted in hope and trust; it will allow the Archdiocese to be vibrant, sustainable, and focused on mission.

The Temple in Jerusalem was a beautiful structure that filled an important purpose for many years—but because of the new covenant established by Jesus, it eventually passed from the scene. The same thing may be true for certain structures in the Church today, including certain parishes, churches, and other buildings, institutions, schedules, and arrangements. All of them have served a valuable purpose, but when times and circumstances change, the Church must change with them—for our mission isn't to establish and maintain earthly structures, but to help as many people as possible find the way to Heaven.

In the Gospel Jesus warns of false prophets, and commands us, and *warns* us, “Do not follow them!” According to information from the Archdiocese, some of the false prophets we need to reject might include various temptations in regard to restructuring: the temptation to make hasty decisions driven by fear or anxiety; the temptation to spread rumors, gossip, or accusations; the temptation to deny reality, thinking for instance, “If only our priests all worked a little harder, everything would be fine,” or “change really isn't necessary—somehow everything will work out”; the temptation to think, “I don't care what happens as long as *my* parish remains open and *my* favorite Mass time remains unchanged;” and the temptation to look for someone to blame, or to give into anger or frustration or discouragement. These reactions or temptations are all like false prophets who would deceive us or lead us astray; we must not follow them, but only the inspirations of the Holy Spirit.

You'll be hearing much more about the restructuring process in the months to come, and every Catholic, here at I.C. and throughout the Archdiocese, will have the opportunity to offer feedback and suggestions—but everything must be done in a spirit of humility, self-surrender, and trust. At this stage there are many more questions than answers, even as this process has occurred, or is being undertaken, in at least thirty other dioceses across the United States. I can't tell you exactly what the final result will be, but I can assure you the Archbishop and all the archdiocesan officials and consultants are making every effort to follow the Holy Spirit's guidance and inspiration as we undertake this major and historic restructuring. Change isn't always easy, but Jesus promises He will never forsake or disappoint those who trust in Him.