

## THIRTY THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME. 2025

Some things are built to last, but nothing in this world is built to last forever. Today's Gospel, Luke 21: 5-19, like this very season of Autumn, challenges us to remember this.

In 19 B.C, Herod the Elder began a tremendous restoration of Jerusalem's Temple, a restoration so tremendous that it amounted to a rebuilding. By the time the Lord Jesus' public ministry began, 46 years later, Herod the Elder was long gone, but the work on his Temple was only then nearing completion. The astonishing structure was one of the wonders of its age, and was built to last. Forty six years had gone into building it, and people expected it to last for centuries.

It lasted 40 years.

Everyone else was mightily impressed with the Temple, but Jesus of Nazareth was not. As we saw last Sunday, Jesus did not care for the way the Temple was run. Jesus, with His keen insight, discerned that the Temple had become more important for people than the God worshipped therein, and that angered Him. Indeed, with His keen insight, Jesus could see that disaster was coming. He didn't say when the disaster would come, but He did say that it would come.

We know from later history that the chronic misunderstandings between Romans and Jews, fed by formidable arrogance on the part of both remarkable nations, eventually produced two wars. When a tough heavyweight fights a tough lightweight, it doesn't actually require a heavenly vision to predict how the fight will turn out. Unsurprisingly, the Romans won both wars. The first war ended with the destruction of Jerusalem's Temple, and the second war ended with the obliteration of Jerusalem itself, the city plowed under and replaced by the Roman colony of Aelia Capitolina. Only after the Emperor Constantine became Christian, two centuries later, was the name "Jerusalem" restored to the city. In today's Gospel passage, Jesus of Nazareth anticipates the first tragic war between Rome and the Jews, warning His hearers not to be dazzled by a Temple that would not stand for as long as it took to build it.

Supernaturally, as the great and final Prophet, Jesus of Nazareth could see that grand and glorious Temple was doomed. This was not a matter of fortune telling, but of discerning the judgement of God. In this, Jesus of Nazareth had Old Testament precedent. The prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel had foretold the destruction of the First Temple, as a consequence of the people having to come to view the Temple more as a source of pride and arrogance for them than as a place of humble and contrite worship of Almighty God. Jesus of Nazareth knew that the Temple of His day was equally mortal and under divine judgement, that it, too, had become a source of pride and arrogance for the people rather than a place where the God of Justice and Mercy was worshipped with repentance and humble trust. Less spiritually, Jesus of Nazareth, even at a natural, human level, could tell, on the basis of present problems, that disaster was just beyond the horizon. In human terms, Jesus of Nazareth, a devout Jew who got along with the Romans He encountered, but who was also well aware of the flaws of Jews and Romans alike, could see that the interaction of Roman pride and stubbornness with Jewish pride and stubbornness was going to produce war eventually, a war which the lightweight Jews would fight with tragic courage but which the heavyweight Romans would win. Both naturally and supernaturally (Grace building on nature, as Thomas Aquinas would say), Jesus could see, as Daniel once saw, "the writing on the wall." He could see the end of the local world as His

disciples knew it. He warned them, therefore, to focus on the world that will never end, the Kingdom of God, already starting to be present in them through Faith.

Awareness that this world will end, and focus on the world that will never end, the Kingdom of God already in our midst through Faith, is what every Catholic Funeral should signal to believers and to the world.

There are three stages to the Catholic Funeral, the gathering at the home, the Holy Mass at the church, and the farewell at the cemetery. Together, these proclaim the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the participation of the Faithful Departed in His Death and Resurrection.

For various reasons, in our particular culture the evening gathering at home has been replaced by a gathering at the "Funeral Home" or at the church. That is often the best that we can do, but there is some danger that the "flavor" of the evening gathering gets lost. The evening gathering is about family and friends coming together to remember the deceased and support each other. It certainly includes prayer, often but not necessarily the praying of the Rosary. The focus of the evening gathering, however, is on fellowship and remembering.

The main event of a Catholic Funeral is the morning Mass at the Church. Like any Mass, the Funeral Mass has a Liturgy of the Word, with Scripture readings and a some words for the day, and a Liturgy of the Eucharist, in which the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ is represented, and in which the Risen Lord is mystically but really present, Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity. The morning Mass has some room for a few words of remembrance, but its focus is on the Death, Resurrection, Presence, and Promises, of Jesus Christ.

In our culture, particularly when the deceased was politically or socially prominent, many people will want to say some words at the Funeral Mass. It is a mistake to let them do so, as my dear old Dad understood when he warned me against making the sermon about him. A few words of remembrance are not out of place, but the Liturgy of the Word at the Funeral Mass needs to be about how the Risen Christ passed through death to Life, and leads the Faithful Departed through that same great Passover.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist is fundamental for every Catholic. In every Eucharistic Sacrifice, but especially in a Funeral Mass, the Faithful living in this world and the Faithful Departed are united in Jesus Christ, the Conqueror of sin and death. As we pray the Eucharistic Sacrifice, we join our prayers to the prayer of Jesus Christ, the self-offering that takes away the sins of the world and opens the gate to Eternal Life. As the Faithful on earth mystically partake of the Lord's Table, they pray that the Faithful departed may be fed at the heavenly banquet, where God is eternally and joyfully the Food of the loving soul. In the Eucharistic Sacrifice, we pray the most powerful prayer there is, the prayer that Jesus Christ entrusted to His Church on the evening before His Passion, with and for the Faithful Departed.

After the Funeral Mass, there is a final farewell at the cemetery. This is short, as we inter the remains of the mortal body and look forward to the Resurrection. We say farewell, for now but not forever, and then go our separate ways with trust in the One Who is the Resurrection and the Life.

Temples and the mortal body pass. At this Mass and in the Funeral Liturgy, we recall and are in contact with that which does not pass, the word of the Lord, and the Life of the Risen Lord, Jesus Christ. By His Grace, may we share in that Life forever. Amen.

