

Homily for 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

The readings today seem filled with gloom and doom. For the readings are given to us not to incite fear but rather to invite reflection about how we live our lives today. To offer hope drawing our attention to the action of God even beyond the present history. We should not be deceived by the impact of the modern media. We should not allow ourselves to despair. Christian faith is built on hope! God is still in control of the world. God is still part of our history. And even amidst human frailty God still loves the world. This sense of hope is seen in the last lines of today's first reading: "And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever" (Dan 12:3). In the gospel passage it is the reference to the "Son of Man" that brings the sense of hope. The author of the second reading highlights the same. In the midst of this description of gloom and fear, Jesus gives us the example of the fig tree. It is a positive image. It is an image of new life. In the midst of the old world dying, the fig tree buds and puts forth new leaves. It is a hopeful description, isn't it? It also leads to a question. What are the new buds, the new life that come with advancing years?

It is choosing to live simply. We know there are people who spend their lives locked in themselves and whose only concern is that the world bow down to their needs. *Once upon a time there was a woman married to a most annoying man. He would complain about everything. He never helped out. He expected to be taken care of all the time. One day he went to the creek with his mule. He complained so much that the mule got annoyed and kicked him to death. At the funeral, when all the men walked by the wife she shook her head "yes." Every time the women walked by she shook her head "no." The priest asked the woman: "Why are you shaking your head "yes" for men and "no" for women?" Her response was: "The men would say how sorry they felt for me and I was saying, 'Yes, I'll be alright.' When the women walked by, they were asking if the mule was for sale..."* And while the husband may be an extreme example, the many variations of his behaviour find a home in many places and peoples in our world. The readings challenge us to look at life differently...not with self-centred concern but with compassion and care. It calls us to see with new eyes. Life has become so complicated. Nowadays many people seem pumped up rushing from dawn to dusk between countless phone calls and texts with no time to see other people's faces. Full of stress from complicated and constantly changing problems.

We need to choose a sober lifestyle, free of unnecessary hassles. It would involve giving up all those things that fill our lives but empty our hearts. Let us choose simplicity. The simplicity of new buds and so rediscover the courage of silence and prayer. Let us choose people over things so that personal, not virtual relationships may flourish. Let us value the simple things of everyday life. It is to see that the person who cuts us off in traffic might be a single mother who worked nine hours that day and is rushing home to cook dinner, help with homework, do the laundry and spend a few precious moments with her children. Perhaps the elderly couple who are walking annoyingly slowly through the store aisles and who block our shopping progress are savouring this moment, knowing that, based on the biopsy report she got back last week, this might be the last time that they will be able to go shopping together for a while. There is hope in us when we begin to learn to think differently and taking the next step and moving outside of ourselves: to lend a hand to those in need, a listening ear to those who are lonely and a compassionate and understanding heart to those who find themselves living on the fringes of society. When we are simple, wisdom grows along with us and so do the miracles. And when we learn to give ourselves in service to each other and to those in need that we gain a proper perspective on life and let Jesus Christ lead us so that we might, in the words of the prophet Daniel, "be wise and shine brightly...like the stars forever." Lord, I thank you for all the blessings of my life.