

Ruminations

In the first reading (Jer 33:14-16) the Lord, speaking through the prophet Jeremiah, says that the days are coming when He will fulfill the promises that He had made to Israel and Judah. He will raise a shoot from David that is righteous and just. Then Judah will be safe and Jerusalem secure. They will call her "The Lord, our Justice."

Background

Jeremiah was born in the mid-7th century B.C.. At that time Assyria had conquered the ten tribes of the northern kingdom of Israel. The kingdom of Judah had been spared by agreeing to pay a tribute to Assyria and later to Babylon. In 597 B.C. Judah stopped paying and Babylon raided Jerusalem, sacked the temple treasury and took its holy objects. Ten years later although God used Jeremiah to prophesize that He would protect King Zedekiah, the king chose to make political alliances with Egypt to protect Jerusalem. This angered Babylon and they returned once again to sack Jerusalem. This time they sent 10,000 of the educated and skilled citizens of Judah into exile to insure that there would be no further rebellion. They also completely destroyed the temple. While the city was under siege, Jeremiah prophesized that God would raise up a new king from the shoot of Jesse (David's father) to replace Zedekiah who would do what was right and would bring justice to the land. Zedekiah would be the last king in the line of David before Jesus. Ten years after the fall of Jerusalem, we take up today's reading.

Something to Think About:

King Zedekiah chose not to rely on God but on his own devices. As a result of his decision Jerusalem had to suffer the consequences. Today's passage Jeremiah is reminding the people that in spite of the destruction they have seen all around them and in spite of the fact that the whole family of Zedekiah had been killed, God will remain faithful to His promises. We are reminded that even when things appear to be impossible, they are not impossible for God. WE have been given even greater promises and hope through the birth and passion of Jesus who has died to save us. Because of this there is nothing now that God will not do for us in order that we might be with Him for all eternity, if only we are open to the graces He wants to give us.

In the second reading (1 Thes 3:12-4:2) Paul prays that the Thessalonians will increase and abound in love for each other and for all. They should strengthen their hearts and be blameless in holiness before God the Father when Jesus comes. Paul exhorts them in the name of Jesus to conduct themselves in a way to please God even more than they are currently doing. They know the instructions that they had received from.

Background

The people of the early Church had expected that Jesus would return soon to restore justice and peace. When He failed to do so, many became disheartened and impatient. Some longed to return to their former way of life. Paul recognized their concern and exhorts them in today's reading to continue to work to please God even more than they were currently doing.

Something to Think About:

While the early Church expected Jesus to return momentarily, we often act as if He is not going to return at all. The end of the world might not come today or tomorrow but we do not know whether or not our life will come to an end in such short order. Would that God would find us exerting ourselves to please Him all the more up to the time of our death. One way might be for each of us to try to repair broken relationships during this Advent season. It might be an opportune time for us to take a first step by sending a Christmas card, along with a little note, to someone with whom we are having a difficult time. This might break the ice, so to speak, that will allow us to show the other some love and allow us to let go of anger or envy or hurt. Jesus humbled Himself in becoming a human creature. How might we humble ourselves to imitate Him?

In the gospel (Lk 21:25-28, 34-36) Jesus tells His disciples that there will be signs in the sun, the moon, the stars and the roaring of the seas. People will die in anticipation of what is coming for the powers of heaven will be shaken. When these things should stand erect and hold their heads high because their redemption is close at hand. They should not allow their hearts to become drowsy that the day might catch them off guard. That day will assault everyone living on the earth. He tells the to be vigilant and pray for the strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent so that they will be able to stand before the Son of Man.

Background

Today's apocalyptic passage from Luke is similar to the one we heard two weeks ago from Mark. The usual theme of this type of writing is that the world as we know it is coming to an end and that a new world is about to begin. During the transition dire judgment would be brought on oppressive persons and institutions while relief would be given to those who were oppressed. The writers of this literature often see faith in God as that catalyst to bring a cosmic change that will usher in a new age. Luke is writing some 10 to 20 years after the destruction of Jerusalem (66 – 70 A.D.). He foresees Jesus ushering a new heavens and a new earth.

Something to Think About:

Everyone faces challenges of various kinds: conflicts at home or work, national and international political challenges, life changing decisions, uncertainties about finances or employment, addictions, spiritual trials, etc.. Sometimes it seems that things cannot get worse. Yet as Christians we know that God is in control and that in the end He will be victorious. We know that Jesus has paid the price for our sinfulness and that we who are united to Him will be victorious with Him. Even now we can begin to realize the victory as we take our minds off our misery and begin to take on the mind of Christ. When we love God with our whole mind, heart, and soul and our neighbors as ourselves, our miseries become bearable and we begin to see the light at the end of the tunnel.

Deacon Mike McKale