

A reading from the book of the prophet Malachi.

Malachi = MAL-uh-kigh

Pause – and look up at the assembly

“See, the day is coming, burning like an oven,
when all the proud and all evildoers will be stubble;
the day that comes shall burn them up,” says the Lord of hosts,
“so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.
But for you who respect my name
the sun of righteousness shall rise,
with healing in its wings.”



PAUSE for **THREE** seconds
then look up at the people
and say SLOWLY:

The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

A reading from the second letter of Saint Paul to the Thessalonians.

Pause - and look up at the assembly

Brothers and sisters,
you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us;
we were not idle when we were with you,
and we did not eat anyone's bread without paying for it;
but with toil and labour we worked night and day,
so that we might not burden any of you.
This was not because we do not have that right,
but in order to give you an example to imitate.
For even when we were with you,
we gave you this command:
"Anyone unwilling to work should not eat."
For we hear that some of you are living in idleness,
mere busybodies, not doing any work.
Now such persons we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ
to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.

PAUSE for **THREE** seconds
then look up at the people
and say SLOWLY:



The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL READING – C 33

The Lord be with you.

And with your spirit.

A reading from the holy gospel according to Luke.

Glory to you, O Lord.

When some were speaking about the temple,
how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God,
Jesus said,

“As for these things that you see,
the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another;
all will be thrown down.”

They asked him,

“Teacher, when will this be,
and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?”

And Jesus said,

“Beware that you are not led astray;
for many will come in my name and say,
‘I am he!’ and, ‘The time is near!’

Do not go after them.

“When you hear of wars and insurrections,
do not be terrified;
for these things must take place first,
but the end will not follow immediately.”

Then Jesus said to them,

“Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom;
there will be great earthquakes,
and in various places famines and plagues;
and there will be dreadful portents
and great signs from heaven.

But before all this occurs,
they will arrest you and persecute you;
they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons,
and you will be brought before kings and governors
because of my name.

This will give you an opportunity to testify.

So make up your minds not to prepare your defence in advance;
for I will give you words and a wisdom
that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict.

You will be betrayed even by parents,
by brothers and sisters,
and by relatives and friends;
and they will put some of you to death.

You will be hated by all because of my name.

But not a hair of your head will perish.

By your endurance you will gain your souls.



The GOSPEL of the LORD.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

SCRIPTURES IN DEPTH

Reading I: Malachi 3:19-20A

Nothing is known of the prophet Malachi. Even his name, which in Hebrew means “My messenger,” may simply be a deduction from Mal 3:1. Nor is it known when he wrote, though he probably came after the Exile. It is therefore impossible to place his prophecies in a concrete historical situation, as they should be, like all Hebrew prophecy.

But this does not matter much for the present reading, since it has a timeless quality about it—the warning that the day of the Lord is coming and that it will spell doom for all the arrogant and evildoers.

But for those who fear the name of God, that day will mean vindication and salvation, beautifully described as the rising of the sun of righteousness with healing in its wings.

In his well-known Christmas hymn, Charles Wesley applied these words to the birth of Christ:

Risen with healing in his wings
Light and life to all he brings,
Hail, the Sun of Righteousness!
Hail, the heaven-born Prince of Peace!

Thus interpreted, this reading strikes two notes. One is the last judgment, which will be dominant on the next two Sundays, and the other is the coming of Christ in his nativity, which will be developed on the latter Sundays of Advent. The end of the old Church year dovetails with the beginning of the new.

In the perspective of Malachi, however, the positive part (the rising of the sun with healing in its wings) refers to the last judgment just as much as does the negative part (the warning to the arrogant and evildoers).

Karl Barth once protested that for many Christians the last judgment had become a dire expectation of doom (think of the *Dies irae!*), whereas the New Testament Christians looked forward to “that day” with joy, waiting for and earnestly desiring the coming of the day of the Lord (2 Pet 3:12)

Responsorial Psalm 98:5-6, 7-8, 9

This is another of the enthronement psalms, which celebrate the kingship of YHWH. It has already been used earlier in this Church year.

Psalm 98 is from a collection of magnificent enthronement psalms (Psalms 93, 96-100). They are full of exuberant joy at the saving power of YHWH, visibly expressed (according to scholarly theory) in the enthronement of the king at the new-year festival.

The refrain underlines the fact that the “nations” see God's saving power. If, as some think, the psalm originally celebrated Israel's return from exile in Babylon—it is certainly imbued with the theology of Second Isaiah, as the words “saving power,” “victory,” and “vindication” show—the nations are passive witnesses rather than active participants in the divine salvation. As spectators, they watch Israel return from exile and see in it an act of YHWH's self-vindication.

But in the Christian liturgical community, for which the saving power of God is manifested in the Christ-event, this must be reinterpreted to mean that the nations actually participate in salvation.

Reading II: 2 Thessalonians 3:7-12

Here we are in the substantive exhortation of the second major part of 2 Thessalonians. This idleness was apparently occasioned by a highly concrete situation.

There were members in the church at Thessalonica who, perhaps misled by some early gnosticizing movement, believed that the day of the Lord had already come.

Since they thought that they were in heaven already, the curse of having to work (Gen 3) had been removed. They could therefore eat, drink, and be merry.

Gospel: Luke 21:5-19

Once more we must remember that the literary style of apocalyptic is a peculiar one. The authors do not conceive themselves to be predicting, in an abstract, uninvolved way, the “last things” that are to happen centuries hence; rather, they are interpreting the present crisis in which they are involved as the last crisis of human history, to be followed very soon by its consummation.

Also, apocalyptic literature tends to expand in transmission. Material is added as commentary to what is already there, and this is then adapted in the light of unfolding events. As history proceeds, the original crisis may get worse, or it may be temporarily lifted.

A good example of this process is the transmission of the so-called Apocalypse of Enoch, which suffered additions and alterations over a period of some 150 years. So, too, is it with our Lord's apocalyptic words.

There can be no doubt that he predicted the destruction of the temple. In fact, that was one of the charges brought against him at his trial, although his accusers could not make it stick (Mk 14:58; 15:29; Jn 2:19; see Acts 6:14).

With the series of crises in Judean history that mounted to a crescendo during the sixties of the first century A.D., this nuclear saying of Jesus was expanded into a “little apocalypse.”

Traditional apocalyptic material, with its predictions of cosmic disasters preceding the end, together with allusions to the events that were already unfolding, were combined with genuine sayings of Jesus.

One cannot always be sure where the genuine sayings of Jesus end, and where the apocalyptic material and descriptions of actual events begin.

But in this passage we may reasonably conclude that the predictions of historical disasters—wars, earthquakes, pestilence, famine—reflect the events of the sixties, although some of it is described in conventional apocalyptic language.

The predictions of persecutions are genuine warnings of Jesus, addressed to his disciples (Lk 21:12a, 16-19) but elaborated in the light of what actually happened to Peter, Paul, James the Just, and others during that decade (Lk 21:12b).

The promise of divine assistance to the disciples in the time of trial reflects an original promise of Jesus of the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Reginald H. Fuller