

GOSPEL

MARK 13:24-32

Jesus said to his disciples: 'In those days, after the time of distress, the sun will be darkened, the moon will lose its brightness, the stars will come falling from heaven and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory; then too he will send the angels to gather his chosen from the four winds, from the ends of the world to the ends of heaven.

'Take the fig tree as a parable: as soon as its twigs grow supple and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. So with you, when you see these things happening: know that he is near, at the very gates. I tell you solemnly, before this generation has passed away all these things will have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

'But as for that day or hour, nobody knows it, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son; no one but the Father.'

A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

In this Sunday's Gospel passage, the Lord seeks to instruct his disciples on future events. Firstly, it is not a discourse on the end of the world, but rather an invitation to live the present well, to be vigilant and ever ready for when we will be called to account for our life. Jesus says: "in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven. These words make us envision the first page of the Book of Genesis, the narrative of creation: the sun, the moon, the stars — which from the beginning of time shine in their order and bring light, a sign of life — are described here in their decline, as they fall into darkness and chaos, a sign of the end. Instead, the light that shines on that final day will be unique and new: it will be that of the Lord Jesus who will come in glory with all the saints. In that encounter we will at last see his Face in the full light of the Trinity: a Face radiant with love, before

which every human being will also appear in absolute truth.

Human history, like the personal history of each of us, cannot be understood as a simple succession of meaningless words and facts. Nor can it be interpreted in the light of a fatalistic vision, as if all were already preordained according to a fate that removes any space for freedom, preventing us from making choices as the fruit of true decision. In today's Gospel passage, however, Jesus says that the history of peoples and that of individuals have a purpose and an aim to fulfil: the definitive encounter with the Lord. We know neither the time nor the way in which it will come about: the Lord emphasized that "no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son"; all is safeguarded in the secret of the mystery of the Father. We know, however, a basic principle with which we must confront ourselves: "Heaven and earth will pass away", Jesus says, "but my words will not pass away". This is the true crux. On that day, each of us will have to understand whether the Word of the Son of God has illuminated our personal existence, or whether we turned our back to it, preferring to trust in our own words. More than ever, it will be the moment in which to abandon ourselves definitively to the Father's love and to entrust ourselves to his mercy.

No one can escape this moment, none of us! Shrewdness, which we often instil in our conduct in order to validate the image we wish to offer, will no longer be useful; likewise, the power of money and of economic means with which we pretentiously presume to buy everything and everyone, will no longer be of use. We will have with us nothing more than what we have accomplished in this life by believing in his Word: the all and nothing of what we have lived or neglected to fulfil. We will take with us only what we have given.

Let us invoke the intercession of the Virgin Mary that, with the verification of our impermanence on earth and of our limitations, she not allow us to collapse into anguish, but call us back to responsibility for ourselves, for our neighbour, for the entire world.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Does this reading make you fearful, or hopeful - and what does your reaction say about how you are living your life and understanding God's love and mercy - and your own call to transformation?
- Pope Francis describes this discourse as being an invitation on how to live the present well, to be vigilant and ever ready for when we will be called to account for our life. If you knew you were in the final days of your life now - what would you look to do and say?
- How does the impermanence of earthly life make you want to live and act for ourselves, for our neighbour, for the entire world.

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the 'Glory Be' or similar prayer.