

Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year B

33rd Sunday of Ordinary Time

First reading: (Daniel 12.1-3)

The Resurrection of the Dead

We are coming towards the end of the Church's year. This passage looks towards the end of all things. It is a crucial passage, for here, for the first time in the Bible, the Resurrection of the dead is proclaimed. The Book of Daniel was written during a great persecution of the Jews a couple centuries before Christ. It was then that finally the Resurrection of those who remain true to the Lord was revealed.

The earlier Israelites pictured the afterlife as a sort of powerless, shadowy half-existence in Sheol, where the dead could not even praise God. Yet there had been many hints of conviction that God would never desert those who love him: 'I know that my Redeemer lives, and that from my flesh I will look on God', said Job. Only now, under the stress of the death of martyrs in the persecution, is the full truth revealed: at the end of time God will intervene to draw his own to himself in fullness of life. In this reading, 'many will awaken' does not mean that some will not awaken; it merely indicates a vast number, the almost limitless multitude of the dead.

Question:

Which of the martyrs in modern times do you admire most?

Second reading: (Hebrews 10.11-14, 18)

One Single Sacrifice

In this, our last reading from the Letter to the Hebrews, Christ is pictured in the terms of the coronation song, Psalm 110, as the Son of God, sharing God's throne. His sacrifice on the Cross was not an act of vengeance by God, inflicting on Jesus the pains which we deserve, after which God suddenly changed his mind and rehabilitated Jesus. It was the consummate act of loving obedience, by which Jesus, on behalf of all humanity, reversed the disobedience of Adam and united us all to God.

The Resurrection, by which Christ was raised to glory, the Son of God in power, was the recognition of this renewal of life. The sacrifices of the Old Law were partial, temporary and needed to be repeated. Christ's offering in obedience was complete, and could never be repeated.

Writing to the Corinthians Paul uses the same psalm to show that Christ is waiting to put the last great enemy, Death, under his feet, and so present the Kingdom to his Father. This is the glorious awakening described in the first reading.

Question:

What is the importance of the Resurrection?

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Gospel:

(Mark 13.24-32)

The Coming of the Son of Man

Jesus saw his mission to be the establishment of the sovereignty of God, the kingship and rule of God over the world, even in rebellious human hearts. Using the language and imagery of his time, he described this 'earth-shaking' event in terms of cosmic disturbances. The coming of God, the Day of the Lord, would constitute the end of the world as we know it.

As Christians we must acknowledge that the death and Resurrection of Christ utterly changed the world for ever; it was the Day of the Lord. And yet, the world still continues, and we have still to prepare for the Day of the Lord, when we will come into that awesome presence. That meeting can be pictured only in terms of collapse and upheaval, our world turned upside down. At death all our familiar realities cease, even the ticking of the clock. At death, time ceases to have meaning. We do not know, and have no need to know when or how this will occur. For all it will come, for each it will be an individual meeting, but will it be all together or each individually? The Son of Man will gather his own, in great power and glory.

Question:

Should we be afraid of death or should we look forward to it?
