

Sunday Homily

33RD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

14 NOVEMBER 2021

YEAR B

DIVINE OFFICE WEEK I

"Take the fig tree as a parable."

Illustration

Throughout human history the art of storytelling has developed in many cultures as a way of keeping the past alive and comforting the people when the future looked bleak. Every country has its heroes and heroic stories.

An example of this can be found in the stories surrounding William Wallace, an early Scottish leader, who managed to unite the clans in their self-identity and rouse them to fight off the forces occupying his country. His short-lived rebellion was ultimately put down, yet even today his name continues to inspire a passion in his country, and the myths surrounding his achievements have grown with the centuries. A 1995 film, *Braveheart*, captures something of this, as Wallace rallies his small band of followers before a battle in which many of them will undoubtedly die. He convinces them that, in spite of the fate awaiting them, no one can take away their inner freedom.

Gospel Teaching

On some occasions a people or nation is called upon to stand up for the values it holds dear. This may cause hardship or even lead to wars in defence of human rights and religious freedoms. This was the position the Jewish people found themselves in when the book of Daniel was written. The writer sought to unite his people and offer them some solace. The faithful were under pressure from a military force, but also in a more insidious way, from the temptation to renounce their faith and blend into the crowd. Belief in the God of the Jews, and its corresponding way of life, did not seem politically correct in a world where expediency had replaced commitment. In every generation, the danger is that values remain valid only as long as those who shape public opinion deem them to be viable.

It is against this ever-changing landscape that Daniel proclaims the true destination of all our human longings. It is the Lord who has formed each of us for fullness of life with him.

Jesus of Nazareth would have been familiar with the imagery and comforting message of a bright new future, contained in the stories of his people and expressed in the book of Daniel, written about 150 years before his birth. He too lived in restless times under occupation. Yet, in a world much more connected to the earth and the changing of the seasons, Jesus talked about the signs of spring as an indication of our liberation. The words of today's Gospel were written to

reassure a Christian people suffering persecution that the end would come soon, heralded by great cosmic signs. The truth is that, as Jesus himself says, no one knows for sure when these things may occur, not even the Son of Man himself.

What is certain is that through one sure and final redemptive act, we are forever set free from our burden of sin, and are offered the possibility of eternal life. The only price for people of faith is that they trust in the saving power of a God who calls them by name, and for the moment play their part in the divine author's plan for humanity.

Application

As we act out the human story of our time, can we discern similar attitudes to those faced by the Jews in the book of Daniel? On the whole our Western society seems unsure of itself. Some seem to be turning to superficial forms of spirituality that offer easy answers with no commitment. We have a choice: accept the prevailing culture and its attendant confusion, or be a people of vision, a people who attempt to discern the signs of the times for ourselves and the world around us. Christ offers us a chance to be truly free, to glimpse the future possibilities and present reality of his kingdom working in our world.

As a community of faith, we are called to go beyond the superficial, and be alert to our world in the light of Christ, knowing that he is already saving the world. As the Church, that does not mean always rushing to condemn those around us. Nor does it mean simply waiting for the end times. Perhaps we are called in some way to be the signs of his life and freedom here and now, even if that means swimming against the tide. Discerning his presence means highlighting and supporting the good that we detect in our world. And, with his help, planting the seeds of hope around us that they might flower into the presence of God in our midst.