

Homily for 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B
By Fr. Jerome Ituah, OCD
Readings: Dan 12:1-3; Ps 15(16); Heb 10:11-14,18; Mk 13:24-32
Theme: Dating and Detecting the Signs of the Time

As we approach the end of the liturgical year, the Church presents us with readings about the end times. Our first reading is from the book of Daniel. It alludes to the end of the reign of Antiochus and the final deliverance of Israel from the last tribulation. Antiochus Epiphanes was a Seleucid king who reigned from about 175 to 164 B.C. His attempt to suppress Judaism brought about the revolt of the Maccabees. When he heard of the defeat of his forces in Palestine by Judas Maccabeus (cf. 1 Mac 6:1-7; 2 Mac 9:1-3), he was enraged and threatened to attack Palestine (cf. 2 Mac 9:4). But he took ill and died in Tabae in Persia (cf. 1 Mac 6:8-16; 2 Mac 9:5-28). His plan to attack Jerusalem failed, and that marked the end of his persecution of the Jews. The end of the persecution will be followed by a time of happiness. Those who remained faithful and died for their faith will be raised up to everlasting happiness.

Our reading begins with 'at that time.' This phrase is a reference to the time of the persecution of Antiochus. Michael will stand up in defence of the Israelites to quell the battle. Hence the passage says he mounts guard over the people. The time of Antiochus was one of great distress for the people, and many were killed. It was a time of lawlessness and persecution of the Jews. But there is the promise of the resurrection for those whose names are found in the book. Which book? We see this book described as the Book of Life in Revelation (cf. Rev 13:8; 20:12,15; 21:27). Those who stood firm and remained faithful throughout the persecution have their names written in the Book of Life. Thus, in our first reading, we see glimpses of the resurrection. There is a clear statement about the last judgment and the resurrection, which will be expanded later in the New Testament. 'Of those who lie sleeping in the dust of the earth, many will awake, some to everlasting life, some to everlasting shame and disgrace.' Daniel expounds Isaiah's framework of the resurrection, the reconciliation, and restoration promised to Israel through the Servant figure (cf. Isa 52:13-53:12; Isa 26:19; Eze 37:1-14).

Jesus in the gospels speaks about the end of time. He tells his disciples some of the signs that will be associated with the end. There will be changes on the earth before the Son of Man comes in the clouds of heaven with great power and glory (cf. Dan 7). The immediate context of the gospel is the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem that would happen in 70 A.D. However, Jesus interweaves that destruction with the end of time. The destruction of the temple was seen in Judaism as a pointer to the destruction of the world because the temple was a microcosm of the universe. Therefore, the two events of the temple destruction and the end of the world are related. Of the temple in Jerusalem, Jesus states, 'before this generation has passed away all these things will have taken place.' The temple was actually destroyed in 70AD. But of the end of time, he says, 'But as for that day or hour, nobody knows it, neither the angels of heaven nor the Son; no one but the Father.'

The words of Jesus need some explanation within the context. Jesus appears to be saying that his knowledge is limited. If he is God, he should know everything, including the end of the world. After all, he says, 'The Father and I are one' (cf. Jn 10:13). The Catechism of the Catholic Church offers us some explanation. 'By its union to the divine wisdom in the person of the Word incarnate, Christ enjoyed in his human knowledge the fullness of understanding of the eternal plans he had come to reveal. What he admitted to not knowing in this area he elsewhere declared himself not sent to reveal.' (CCC 473-474). In other words, Jesus knew the mind of God, but he was not sent to reveal this particular aspect of the mind of his Father. Hence, he says to the disciples just before His ascension that it was not for them to know certain information. They asked him, 'Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' he said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed

by his own authority.’ (Acts 1:6-7). Although Jesus knows, he was not meant to reveal it to his disciples because that should not be their focus. It is not for us to know the times and seasons concerning the end. Instead, we should live our lives following the command of Jesus. ‘Those who live their lives well will shine brightly as the vault of heaven for all eternity.’

The end will come with signs of persecution and tribulation, as we see in the first reading. When we see the persecution of Christians today and the many tribulations and natural disasters happening in the world, we may be tempted to say the end has come. Ours is not to be worried about the date and time of the end, but to prepare and be ready either for our individual ends (death) or the final coming of the Son of Man (the end of the world).