

GOSPEL

LUKE 21:5-19

When some were talking about the Temple, remarking how it was adorned with fine stonework and votive offerings, Jesus said, 'All these things you are staring at now - the time will come when not a single stone will be left on another: everything will be destroyed.' And they put to him this question: 'Master,' they said 'when will this happen, then, and what sign will there be that this is about to take place?'

'Take care not to be deceived,' he said 'because many will come using my name and saying, "I am he" and, "The time is near at hand." Refuse to join them. And when you hear of wars and revolutions, do not be frightened, for this is something that must happen but the end is not so soon.' Then he said to them, 'Nation will fight against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes and plagues and famines here and there; there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven.

'But before all this happens, men will seize you and persecute you; they will hand you over to the synagogues and to imprisonment, and bring you before kings and governors because of my name - and that will be your opportunity to bear witness. Keep this carefully in mind: you are not to prepare your defence, because I myself shall give you an eloquence and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to resist or contradict. You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relations and friends; and some of you will be put to death. You will be hated by all men on account of my name, but not a hair of your head will be lost. Your endurance will win you your lives.'

The Gospel of the Lord.

A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

Today's Gospel passage contains the first part of Jesus' discourse on the end times, [according to] the writing of Saint Luke (21:5-19). Jesus made this proclamation while standing before the Temple of Jerusalem, and was prompted by the peoples' words of

admiration for the beauty of the sanctuary and its decorations (cf. v. 5). Then Jesus said: "the days will come when there shall not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down" (v. 6). We can imagine the effect these words had on Jesus' disciples. However, he did not want to insult the temple, but rather make it understood — to them as well as to us today — that human structures, even the most sacred, are fleeting, and we should not place our security in them. How many supposedly definitive certainties have we had in our lives, which later were revealed to be ephemeral! On the other hand, how many problems have appeared to be a dead end, and then were overcome!

Jesus knows that there are always those who speculate about the human need for safety. For this reason, he says: "Take heed that you are not led astray" (v. 8), and guard against the many false Messiahs who will appear (v. 9). Even today there are these! And, he adds, do not be frightened and bewildered by wars, revolutions, and disasters, since even these are part of the world's reality (cf. vv. 10-11). The history of the Church is rich with examples of people who withstood tribulations and terrible suffering with serenity, because they were aware that they were firmly in God's hands. He is a faithful Father, an attentive Father, who does not abandon his children. God never abandons us! We must have this certainty in our heart: God never abandons us!

Remaining firm in the Lord, in this certainty that he does not abandon us, walking in hope, working to build a better world, despite the difficulties and sad circumstances which mark our personal and collective existence, is what really counts; it is how the Christian community is called to encounter the "day of the Lord". It is precisely within this context that we want to place the undertaking that we have lived with faith during these months of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, which concludes today in the Dioceses of the world with the closing of the Holy Doors in the cathedral Churches. The Holy Year impelled us, on the one hand, to fix our gaze toward the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God and, on the other, to build a future on this earth, working to

evangelize the present, so we can make it a time of salvation for everyone.

In the Gospel Jesus encourages us to keep firmly in mind and in heart the certainty that God guides our history, and that he knows the final end of things and events. Under the the Lord's merciful gaze, history unravels in flowing uncertainty, and weaves between good and evil. However, all that happens is contained within him. Let us pray to the Virgin Mary that she may help us, through the happy and sad events of this world, to firmly maintain hope in eternity and in the Kingdom of God. Let us pray to the Virgin Mary, that she may help us deeply understand this truth: that God never abandons his children!

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- In what do you put your trust – house, money, friends, job, government? What gives you this sense of assurance? What is today's gospel saying about these things?
- Jesus calls us to a radical trust in the enduring presence and reliability of God to walk with us in the face of calamity, opposition and material decay. What might it feel like to take up this radical call of trusting in God – what would it mean for your life?

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.