

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

This work was composed by an anonymous writer shortly before Nehemiah's arrival in Jerusalem in 455 B.C. Because of the sharp reproaches he was leveling against the priests and rulers of the people, the author probably wished to conceal his identity. To do this he made a proper name out of the Hebrew expression for "My Messenger" (Malachi).¹ This is the last word of the Old Testament as it falls last in the canon of its books. Malachi has some scathing things to say about the irreverence of the worship and immorality of the actions of the priests and people of Israel after the return from the Babylonian exile. God threatens to throw dung in the faces of the priests for offering defective sacrifices and not teaching the true doctrine of the covenant. He chastises the laity for being unfaithful to their marital covenants and for cheating the poor. That is the setting for our reading, which is directed to those who fear the Lord for they will be spared God's wrath and enjoy the sun of justice. As with all the prophets, judgment always finishes with mercy.² In the verses preceding our selection, the question posed is that if things go well for those who do evil and tempt God, (v.15) why should one obey the Lord's commandments? (v.14) The prophet's reply is to announce a day of judgment when the wicked will be destroyed!¹⁵

Malachi 3:19-20a

19Lo, the day is coming, The Day of Yahweh is the time when God comes in judgment. It will be a time of blessing and prosperity for the pious whose names are registered in God's "record book." It will also be a time of punishment for sinners.³ **blazing like an oven, when all the proud and all evildoers will be stubble,** In Biblical language stubble represents the mighty who happen to be unjust. They are of little weight in God's eyes and God will make them disappear as easily as fire destroys stubble.⁵ **and the day that is coming will set them on fire, leaving them neither root nor branch, says the Lord of hosts.** This image is that of a farmer who burns the stubble from a field in preparation for the next planting. On a dry, hot early autumn day, a field of stubble is like a tinderbox. The short stems left from the harvest are lifeless and stiff and hollow. When the blaze touches them, they don't so much burn up as simply disappear in a flash. The ash that is left is so insubstantial that a touch reduces it to dust.⁴

20But for you who fear my name, This refers to those who have the right attitude towards God: they recognize God as Creator, as infinitely powerful, just, and good. They have faith in a just God and confidence in a Father.⁵ **there will arise the sun of justice** Christian tradition applies this title to Jesus Christ. Origen writes: "The Lord came in the evening to a world in decline, when the course of life was almost run; but when the Sun of justice came, he gave new life and began a new day for those who believed in him."¹⁵ **with its healing rays.** The revealing heat of the sun of justice is the opposite of destruction to those who fear God. It brings healing with its rays. Healing implies an illness. It is not perfection or heroic holiness that merits the healing rays; it is that gift of the Spirit we call "fear of the Lord," the kind of humble reverence that enables us to see ourselves honestly—flawed creatures who nonetheless accept and rejoice in the love God has shown us. Such reverence welcomes the final judgment.⁴

2 Thessalonians 3:7-12

Some of the Thessalonians, wrongly thinking that the Second Coming of Christ, was about to happen, had given up working and were living in idleness, minding everyone's business but their own.⁶ Stringent measures are to be taken against them: avoidance of voluntary association with them (v 6), refusal to support them gratuitously (v 10), and a gradual but firm exclusion of them from the community (v 14).¹

Brothers and sisters:

7You know how one must imitate us. Paul points out three distinct ways in which he and his fellow workers, Silas and Timothy, should be imitated: they lived orderly lives, they worked for their own keep, and they led exemplary lives that could be imitated.¹⁰ **For we did not act in a disorderly way among you,**

nor did we eat food received free from anyone. On the contrary, in toil and drudgery, night and day we worked, so as not to burden any of you. Paul was a trained Rabbi; but the Jewish law laid it down that a Rabbi must take no pay for teaching. He must have a trade and must satisfy his daily needs with the work of his hands. The Jew believed in the dignity of honest toil; and they were sure that a scholar lost something when he became so academic and so withdrawn from life that he forgot how to work with his hands.⁸ Paul's trade was that of a tent maker. He probably preached during the day and made tents at night.⁹

9Not that we do not have the right. Rather, we wanted to present ourselves as a model for you, so that you might imitate us. Paul was teaching the Thessalonians by example about the dignity and necessity of human labor.¹⁷

10In fact, when we were with you, we instructed The word used here in the original writing is very strong. It means a rule, not a suggestion.⁹ **you that if anyone was unwilling to work, neither should that one eat.** This has been called the Golden Rule of Work.⁸ The refusal to work, idleness, and sloth are branded by the bible as reviling sins. "The sluggard is like a stone in the mud; ...like a lump of dung; whoever touches him wipes his hand." Sirach 22:1-2.⁵ The Catechism is adamant that work is a duty. Work honors the Creator's gifts and the talents received from him. It can also be redemptive when one shows himself to be a disciple of Christ by carrying the cross, daily, in the work one is called to accomplish.¹⁶ (CCC 2427) St. Thomas Aquinas wrote that "Manual labor aims at obtaining food, removing idleness, curbing fallen desires, and ENABLING ALMSGIVING."¹⁷

11We hear that some are conducting themselves among you in a disorderly way, by not keeping busy but minding the business of others. Paul admonishes the people about wasting time gossiping, a sin against the fifth commandment "Thou shalt not kill." You kill a person socially, emotionally, and even spiritually inch by inch when you are gossiping about him. Gossips breed distrust, division, discouragement, and finally despair in the body of Christ. Gossip, in some cases, is exciting to hear; and it means those who are hearing it feel like insiders. Instead of building up, gossiping tears down. Jesus calls us to love others as he has loved us. We cannot be tearing someone down through gossip and think we are loving, obedient Christians.⁷

12Such people we instruct and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to work quietly and to eat their own food. A humble and quiet life was all the more necessary in Thessalonica, where disciples were living under clouds of suspicion and distrust as explained in Acts 17:5-9.¹⁷

Luke 21:5-19

Some have referred to this description of the events leading up to the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple as a "Little Apocalypse." Many have remarked upon the comparisons between the events which Jesus describes and those that Josephus the Jewish historian recorded in his chronicle called The Wars of the Jews which he kept while in the employ of the occupying Roman forces who destroyed the Temple in 70 A.D.² This discourse actually deals with three inter-connected subjects — the destruction of Jerusalem, the end of the world and the Second Coming of Christ in glory and majesty.¹²

5While some people were speaking about how the temple was adorned with costly stones and votive offerings, The temple they were admiring was not Solomon's temple, which was destroyed by the Babylonians in the sixth century B.C. The temple in Jesus' day was the one built by Herod the Great begun in 20 B.C. It was much larger than the earlier temples.⁷ The structure was immense.

The pillars of the porches and of the cloisters were columns of white marble forty feet high and each made of one single block of stone. It was one of Herod the Great's major building projects. The votive offerings were memorials made by wealthy donors. One of the offerings was the great vine made of solid gold, each of whose clusters was as tall as a man.¹³

6 Jesus said, "All that you see here — the days will come when there will not be left a stone upon another stone that will not be thrown down."

7 Then they asked him, "Teacher, when will this happen? And what sign will there be when all these things are about to happen?"

8 He answered, "See that you not be deceived, for many will come First century Palestine experienced a surge of messianic fervor. Many claimed to be a "military Messiah" who would lead Israel to overthrow the Romans.¹¹ in my name, saying, 'I am he,' and 'The time has come.' Both of these statements are false. Do not follow them! Jesus shifts the question from the destruction of the temple to the second coming of the Lord.⁹ Basically he tells them not to expect any warning, not to be misled by false prophets and to stay faithful to him.¹²

9 When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified; for such things must happen first, but it will not immediately be the end." Luke wants to show a necessary progression of events and the "end" that he refers to here is the end of the city of Jerusalem.¹⁴

10 Then he said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.

11 There will be powerful earthquakes, famines and plagues from place to place; and awesome sights and mighty signs will come from the sky.

12 Before all this happens, however, they will seize and persecute you, they will hand you over to the synagogues and to prisons, and they will have you led before kings and governors because of my name. Persecutions will provide opportunities to proclaim the gospel and Luke recounts several such episodes where believers are locked up in prisons and hauled before kings and governors.¹¹

13 It will lead to your giving testimony. The fulfillment of this prophecy is literally carried out in Acts. (Acts 3:15; 4:20)

14 Remember, you are not to prepare your defense beforehand, Unlike professional orators who rehearse their speeches before delivering them, disciples should only prepare to be faithful. Christ will give them words through the Holy Spirit.¹¹

15 For I myself shall give you a wisdom in speaking that all your adversaries will be powerless to resist or refute. This is fulfilled in Acts in the story of Stephen when his opponents are "not able to resist his wisdom" and the leaders confronted by John and Peter "had nothing to contradict."¹⁴

16 You will even be handed over by parents, brothers, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. Jesus demands heroic allegiance that may drive a wedge between family members.¹¹

17 You will be hated by all because of my name, His name is equivalent to his mission and his person.⁴

18 but not a hair on your head will be destroyed. This means that God will protect you. It is a colloquialism from 2 Sam 14:11. Here the assurance seems to contradict what happens, but in reality it does not. For what it means is that they will not suffer eternal loss.⁷

19 By your perseverance you will secure your lives.

Some of the material for this commentary is taken from: (1) "Saint Joseph Edition The New American Bible," (2) The Commentary Notes of Sean Innerst, (3) "Old Testament Reading Guide: Malachi" by George Denzer, (4) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 2004" by Aelred R. Rosser, (5) "Saint Joseph Commentary On The Sunday Readings Year C" by Achille Degeest, O.F.M., (6) "The Navarre Bible: Thessalonians," (7) "The Bread of Life Catholic Bible Study" by Deacon Ken e3 Marie Finn, (8) "The Letters To The Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians" by William Barclay, (9) "Workbook For Lectors And Gospel Readers: 1998" by Lawrence E. Mick, (10) "The Collegeville Bible Commentary: 2 Thessalonians" by Ivan Havener, O.S.B., (11) "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Luke," (12) "The Navarre Bible: St Luke," (13) "The Gospel of Luke" by William Barclay, (14) "The Gospel of Luke" by Luke Timothy Johnson, (15) "The Navarre Bible: Minor Prophets," (16) "The Catechism Of The Catholic Church," and (17) "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Letters of St. Paul to the Thessalonians, Timothy, and Titus" With Introduction, Commentary and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch.

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.