33rd Sunday in O.T. 2022

Those who hope that by denying the existence of a problem it will simply go away, are often accused of burying their heads in the sand. It is said that ostriches bury their heads in the sand in the belief if they cannot see the predators, then the predators cannot see them. But this isn’t true - ostriches aren’t that stupid! But it may be true for people who think that by ignoring problems they will just go away.

The Gospel this morning, speaking of turbulent times, is perhaps challenging us to pull our heads out of the sand of our everyday routine, and look reality in the face, because, without doubt, we are living in tempestuous times. Our world abounds with many difficult situations. Just this last week, at the COP27 meeting in Egypt, the Secretary General of the United Nations warned, “We are on a highway to hell with our foot still on the accelerator”! Day-after-day we see the suffering inflicted by a cruel war on the innocent civilians of Ukraine, and in so many other parts of the world. We know that the economic situation promises a difficult winter for many. Here, at home, we despairingly wonder if our local representatives will ever recognise that their primary duty is to provide stable government for the good of the citizens? It would be all too easy to become depressed by such a scenario, but then, in the Gospel, we hear the calm quiet voice of Jesus, *“Do not be frightened”*.

We know from the Gospels that Jesus, and the early Church, lived through turbulent times. In today’s Gospel passage, St Luke relates a number of these storm-tossed episodes, and as we reflect on them, we discover there is much we can learn from them. The first mentioned is Jesus' prediction of the destruction of the Temple; he said that *“the time will come when not a single stone will be left on another”*. The Jews believed that the destruction of the Temple would herald the end of the world. It is no wonder that the disciples, in a state of shock, asked Jesus, *“When will this happen...?”* But Jesus warned them, *“Take care not to be deceived........do not be frightened....the end is not so soon.”* Jesus was advising them, and advises us, not to be knocked off track by catastrophic events; his message is "don't let anyone deceive you, listen carefully, test everything." In challenging times, we cling to the fact that the resurrection follows the crucifixion - as Jesus himself said, *"your endurance will win you your lives."*

Jesus’ prediction of the destruction of the Temple was fulfilled in the year 70 AD. That year, the Romans mercilessly sacked Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple. St. Luke recorded this event in order to reassure his readers that when the world was falling apart around them, it was precisely the time to stand firm in the faith and not to become disillusioned. He exhorts us to do the same. Catastrophe, however, is not always on a macro scale - often it is the world of our more intimate relationships which falls apart, caused, for example, by betrayal in a relationship, or the death of a loved one. Such events can threaten to drag us into a very dark place! Like Mary, the mother of Jesus, there are times when we have to just to stand beneath the Cross, and keep faith.

The Gospel also refers to; *“great earthquakes and plagues and famines here and there; there will be fearful sights and great signs from the heavens.”* St. Luke was referring to the capriciousness of nature – those events beyond the control of man. Today, however, our concern is the terrible destruction being inflicted on nature by humanity’s thoughtless drive for convenience and the greedy exploitation of land and sea. It has been said at COP27, “Our planet is fast approaching tipping points that will make climate chaos irreversible” *(Antonio Guterres).* We cannot take creation for granted, and we must understand that by caring for creation we reverence the Creator.

Another reality for St. Luke's Christians was that of persecution. Jesus exhorted all who suffer for the faith to persevere. He said, *“Your endurance will win you your lives”*. We cannot hear these words and not hold in our prayers our suffering Christian brothers and sisters living in lands where persecution is a daily reality. Pope Francis reminds us that there are more Christian martyrs today than ever before. In solidarity with those who suffer for the faith, let us stand firm in our belief and practice. Jesus says to us, *“Take care not to be deceived”*. Today’s Gospel passage is indeed challenging – we are challenged to take our heads out of the sand of our everyday routines, and to look at the reality of our world, and to reflect on the ultimate meaning of life.

*“Almighty Father,*

*until that Day comes*

*when our eyes will find your face,*

*steady our hearts in time of trial,*

*and grant us patient endurance,*

*through Christ our Lord.”* **Amen.**