November 17, 2018

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time – “Jesus Is Coming! Are We Ready?”
Deacon Dave Snyder

Reading 1: Daniel 12:1-3
In those days, I Daniel, heard this word of the Lord: “At that time there shall arise Michael, the great prince, guardian of your people; it shall be a time unsurpassed in distress since nations began until that time. At that time your people shall escape, everyone who is found written in the book. Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake; some shall live forever, others shall be an everlasting horror and disgrace. But the wise shall shine brightly like the splendor of the firmament, and those who lead the many to justice shall be like the stars forever.”

Reading 2: Hebrews 10:11-14, 18
Brothers and sisters: Every priest stands daily at his ministry, offering frequently those same sacrifices that can never take away sins. But this one offered one sacrifice for sins, and took his seat forever at the right hand of God; now he waits until his enemies are made his footstool. For by one offering he has made perfect forever those who are being consecrated. Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer offering for sin.

Gospel: Mark 13:24-32
Jesus said to his disciples: “In those days after that tribulation the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from the sky, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in the clouds’ with great power and glory, and then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the end of the earth to the end of the sky.

“Learn a lesson from the fig tree. When its branch becomes tender and sprouts leaves, you know that summer is near. In the same way, when you see these things happening, know that he is near, at the gates. Amen, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

“But of that day or hour, no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”

HOMILY
A very zealous, young Southern preacher was traveling the country roads and saw a farmer working in his field. Being very concerned about the farmer’s soul, the preacher asked the man, “Are you laboring in the vineyard of the Lord, my good man?”
Not even looking at the preacher, but continuing his work, the farmer replied, “Naw, these are soybeans.”
“You don’t understand,” said the preacher. “Are you a Christian?”
With the same amount of interest as his previous answer, the farmer said, “Nope, mah name is Jones. Ya must be lookin’ for Jim Christian. He lives ‘bout a mile or two down the road.”
The young determined preacher tried again, asking the farmer, “My good man, are you lost?” referring to those in danger of losing their way to salvation.

“Naw! Lived here all mah life,” answered the farmer.

“Are you prepared for the resurrection?” the frustrated preacher asked.

This caught the farmer’s attention. He stopped, looked up and asked, “Well … when’s it gonna be?”

Thinking he had accomplished something, the young preacher replied, “It could be today, tomorrow, or the next day.” Taking a handkerchief from his back pocket and wiping his brow, the farmer remarked, “Well, now don’t go mentioning it to mah wife. She don’t get out much and she’ll wanna go all three days.”

Given today’s readings, I received a nudge from the Holy Spirit last weekend as my wife, Barb, and I were traveling in Pennsylvania and passed by one of those homemade signs at the side of the road, a sign that read, “Jesus is coming! Are you ready?”

The so-called end times … The return of Jesus … St. Michael and the other heavenly angels gathering the elect … The rapture, according to some religious denominations … As a lead-up to the up-coming Advent Season and our anticipation of the coming of Jesus at Christmas, the readings on this second to the last Sunday of the Church liturgical year typically focus on the end times and the return of Jesus. We certainly see that focus in our 1st Reading and Gospel passage today, don’t we. In the Daniel Reading, Michael is called the great prince. He’s also considered to be the patron angel for Israel, and the passage refers to “a time unsurpassed in distress since nations began until that time.” That mood is continued in Mark’s passage, as “The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from the sky, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.” There is little argument that at some point in time life on earth will cease. Numerous predictions of that date and time have come from both Christian and non-Christian religious sources, as well as scientific and other non-religious sources. There’s a Wikipedia website that lists over 200 predictions of end-time dates, most of which have already passed – those of you old enough to remember may recall the global panic and worldwide calamity expected from the Y2K computer “bug,” and then there was the Mayan 12/21/2012 date, which even resulted in a disaster movie … a disaster in more ways than one. The end-times will be caused by any of a myriad of events according to some polls, including many who believe it will be from an alien invasion or a zombie apocalypse – don’t lose sleep over that one, kids! Many times, as predicted dates have come and gone, the person doing the predicting would admit a calculation error or something similar, and take another guess, or two, or three. Many future predictions include scientific estimates that go as far ahead as the year 22 billion, when the opposite of the Big Bang theory, the Big Rip – ever hear of that one? – might occur. Allow me to paraphrase Jesus’ closing words to today’s Gospel passage, “Predict and guess all you want, only the Father knows the day or the hour.”

Jesus is coming! Are we ready? Instead of doom and gloom, both Daniel and Mark want their readers, including us, to be ready, to be prepared, for the coming of our Lord, and to rejoice in our Lord when He does come. They especially want to motivate us to be prepared. Daniel notes that, “the wise shall shine brightly like the splendor of the firmament, and those who lead the many to justice shall be like the stars forever.” And Mark follows along with, “the Son of Man coming in the clouds’
with great power and glory, and then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the end of the earth to the end of the sky.” The wise, the justice leaders, the elect – the disciples of Jesus from all over the world will be gathered with Him.

Jesus is coming! Are we ready? Are we truly ready? Are we living our lives as disciples of Christ? Perhaps we think we should wait for a better time, some time in the future when we might have more time to focus on living out our faith, some time in the future when the everyday hassles and stresses of our careers, and our family and personal commitments, subside a bit more. Perhaps we think we should wait for our lives to quiet down a bit more so we have time to pray, time to listen to what God is calling us to do. St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta said that, “Prayer is not asking. Prayer is putting oneself in the hands of God, at His disposition, and listening to His voice in the depth of our hearts.” Prayer is listening to His voice, listening to His words, His words which will not pass away, but be eternal; His words which will help us to be prepared for His coming.

As true disciples of Christ, we are asked to follow Christ’s teachings, His words, His actions. Looking at Mark and the other three Gospels, consider what words and actions of Jesus are there for us to follow, to be better disciples, to be ready for Him:

- Mercy and Forgiveness (consider the thief on the cross, consider each one of us – because we are all sinners)
- Compassion (consider how Jesus showed his love and support for the young, the widow, the sick, the deaf, the blind, the poor, those who mourned the dead)
- Authoritative teaching (consider Jesus teaching God’s word in the synagogues, and in the temple area, even at 12 years of age)
- Love of God the Father (the first greatest commandment: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.”)
- Love of those around Him (the second greatest commandment: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”)
- Prayer (Gethsemane, and in the desert)
- Righteous anger (consider how Jesus handled the money-changers in the temple)
- Encouraging others to do the above, being an example to others (consider how Jesus always followed the Will of His Father, even during the most difficult times)

Jesus is coming! Are we ready? If not, will we be ready? As we approach the upcoming Advent Season, consider it to be a great time, and a great opportunity, to prepare for the coming of Jesus – the coming of the Christ Child at Christmas as well as the coming of our Lord and Savior at His Second Coming.

Jesus IS coming. How can we change our lives to be better prepared?