

### *33 Sunday Ordinary Time, C*

One of the most common of all human emotions is anxiety about the future. I think it would be safe to call it a universal emotion. At some time and to some extent, every – one of us wonders and worries about tomorrow.

To acknowledge that; is not necessarily a reflection on anyone's religious faith. It is simply recognition of reality. Our lives are lived within three dimensions of time. Each of us has a past that we remember, a present that we experience, and a future that we anticipate. We cannot eliminate anticipation of the future or blot out memories of the past. They are both a part of our lives and must be included in the experience of today.

Most of us, I think, do a fairly decent job of coping with the past. But what about the future? How are we to deal with this very important dimension of life? Tomorrow is out there; we know that it is coming and we cannot help but think about it. The question is: What should be the nature of our thoughts? What can we actually expect from the days and the weeks that lie ahead?

Well, the Bible doesn't give us any definitive answers to those questions. It does, however, offer some guidelines that should enable us to anticipate tomorrow with a firm faith and a realistic hope.

Our Gospel reading tells of a time when Jesus talked with his disciples about their future. The conversation took place almost 2,000 years ago, and the details are long since outdated. But the insights which Jesus expressed are timeless, and you and I would do well to apply those same principles to our own concerns about the future.

The first is this: We can expect uncertainty. Or to put it another way, we can expect the unexpected. When Jesus foretold the destruction of the temple, the disciples asked him two questions: One,

“When will this occur?” and two, “What will be the sign it is going to happen?” In the light of the discussion, those two inquiries are certainly understandable. If we had been there, we probably would have sought the same information. But the significant thing is that Jesus did not give a direct answer to either question, and that’s how it is with most of our inquiries about the future.

The Bible may give some general ideas. Science may make some educated guesses, but absolute answers are not to be found.

I remember a verse in the Book of James which says, “You have no idea what tomorrow will bring.” That verse was written a long, long time ago, but it is just as true today as it was then. With all of our scientific progress, there is still very little that we know for sure about tomorrow. We know that the sun will rise. We know that the day will be Monday, November 18, 2019. Meteorologists can predict the weather with reasonable accuracy, but they will be the first to admit that their predictions can be wrong.

Most of us have a routine that we follow virtually every Monday morning - getting up at the same time, going to work by the same route, greeting the same people, handling the same responsibilities. We plan to do those same things again in the morning, and probably will; but we should also remember that the routine of life is subject to change without notice. Any one of a thousand things could happen that would alter our plans, not just for Monday morning but maybe for the rest of our lives.

The plain truth is we just don’t know much about tomorrow. But honestly now, how much more would you want to know? It’s always more fun watching a movie for the first time. Something is lost when you know in advance what is going to happen. Would you enjoy watching a football game if you knew the outcome from the

beginning? A large part of the charm of life is locked up in its mystery. Out there in the future, we can expect the unexpected; and for that fact we can all be grateful.

The second thing we can expect is change. It must have been quite a shock to the disciples when Jesus predicted the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. For centuries that structure had stood at the center of their culture. They could not imagine living without it. Yet here was Jesus saying, "Not one stone will be left upon another. It will all be torn down." That prediction proved to be accurate. In less than fifty years, the ancient temple was gone and has never yet been rebuilt.

From that, the disciples learned, and we need to learn, a vital lesson, namely this: nothing stays the same. As someone has said, in this life the only thing constant is change. The days come; the days go; and little by little our old familiar world goes with them.

Concerning change, we can say three things. The first is; we don't like it. Our loyalties lie with the familiar, even though the familiar may be considerably less than ideal.

The second thing we can say is that change is inevitable. Whether we like it or not, our world is going to change. Our nation is going to change. Our church is going to change. Our neighborhoods are going to change. So are our families, and even we, ourselves. Change is inevitable. We could not stop it even if we would.

The third thing we can say is that change is a part of God's purpose. As Christians, we should not only accept it, but should be actively engaged in bringing it about. It was said of the early Christians, "They have turned the world upside down." That is our spiritual heritage. God forgive us if we should now become defenders of the status quo.

Another thing we can expect in the future is trouble. Jesus pulled no punches in talking with the disciples. He told them that there would be wars, earthquakes, plagues, and famines. He warned them that they would be arrested, persecuted, and even put to death for their faith.

Some regard this reading as the gloomiest statement that Jesus ever made, but none can deny that it was true. And in that lies the element of mercy. It would have been a cruel thing to have promised them clear skies and smooth sailing, when he knew they were headed for a storm. At least, this way the adversities and hardships did not come as a complete surprise.

We need to apply that wisdom to our own lives. Let us begin with the assumption that life in this world is essentially difficult and sometimes tragic. Then, at least, we will be dealing with reality. If we start by assuming that the ideal life is soft and easy, we are going to be bitterly disappointed. To say this is not pessimism; it is reality. When we think of the future, we should expect trouble, because it's going to come; and we had best prepare ourselves to deal with it.

Then there is one final statement that puts all of the rest in perspective. It is this: When we think of tomorrow, and all of our tomorrows, we can expect God, because he will be there. Jesus told his disciples that when they were brought to trial, they should not worry about their defense, because he would give them words and a wisdom which their adversaries could not contradict. In other words, he was saying, you will not be alone; I will be with you.

That promise belongs to us just as surely as it belonged to those early disciples. We face an unknown future in a troubled and changing world, but of this we can be certain – he will always be there. However long we live, wherever we may go, whatever we encounter, he will be there. We will never get beyond God.

Some years ago, there was a religious song with a country and western flavor, the chorus of which said this:

“Many things about tomorrow  
I don’t know or understand  
But I know who holds tomorrow  
And I know he will hold my hand.”

When you think of your future, you can expect God, because he will be there. **Amen.**