

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time - B

Note: Where a Scripture text is underlined in the body of this discussion, it is recommended that the reader look up and read that passage.

1st Reading - Daniel 12:1-3

Although this book tells us virtually all that we know about the Prophet Daniel (whose name means “God is my judge”), the author of this book is unknown. The book is arranged in no historical order and has come down to us with different parts written in different languages – some in Hebrew, some in Aramaic, and some in Greek. The portion in Greek [chapter 13 (Susanna), chapter 14 (Bel and the Dragon), and chapter 3:24-90 (The Prayer of Azariah)] are not contained in the Hebrew or, consequently, Protestant canon of scripture. There are unusual changes in construction throughout, the first person frequently alternating with the third. This leads scholars to suspect that multiple authors (and/or editors) may be involved.

The Hebrew Bible locates Daniel in the historical section between Ezra and Esther. The Septuagint (the Greek translation used by the apostles) locates it in the section of prophetic writings as the fourth of the major prophets, after Ezekiel; which is where it is located in Catholic (and strangely, since they follow the Hebrew canon, Protestant) Bibles. The book was written around 300 B.C. or later, while Daniel himself lived some 225 to 300 years earlier.

Daniel had four apocalyptic visions which are described in chapters 7 through 12. Today’s reading comes from the ending of the fourth of these visions.

[In those days, I, Daniel, heard this word of the Lord:] ^{12:1} “At that time there shall arise Michael, the great prince, guardian of your people;

Michael is Israel’s prince (Daniel 10:21). The idea was common in Judaism that every nation had its guardian angel (see Deuteronomy 32:8 where “sons of God” refers to angels). Inasmuch as Michael is Israel’s guardian angel, he is “one of the chief princes,” or archangels.

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.

The book of life (see Exodus 32:32-33; Psalm 69:28). These will be saved.

² Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth

A euphemism for “are dead.”

shall awake;

Shall come back to life. This is the earliest enunciation of the belief in the resurrection of the dead.

some shall live forever,

Literally, “some unto life everlasting” the first occurrence of this term in the Bible.

others shall be an everlasting horror and disgrace. ³ But the wise shall shine brightly like the splendor of the firmament,

The stars, heavenly bodies.

And those who lead the many to justice shall be like the stars forever.

2nd Reading - Hebrews 10:11-14, 18

This is our last week in the Book of Hebrews. Rather than just study the verses leading up to and through the reading this week, let’s study all of Chapter 10 which will take over where we left off last week:

^{10:1} Since the law has only a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of them,

The Old Covenant foreshadows that which is to come through Christ and New Covenant.

it can never make perfect those who come to worship by the same sacrifices that they offer continually each year.

The annual Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) sacrifices were not able to remove sin, they simply foreshadowed the sacrifice of Jesus.

² Otherwise, would not the sacrifices have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, once cleansed, would no longer have had any consciousness of sins?

The very repetition of the sacrifices proves their impotence. If they had taken away the barriers to approaching God directly, they would not have needed to be repeated.

³ But in those sacrifices there is only a yearly remembrance of sins,

The Greek word for “remembrance” is *anamnesis*. The only other New Testament usage of this word is “Do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24-25). This “remembrance” was not mere reminiscence, but an annual rejection of the golden calf sins; just as the Passover meal was an annual renewal of their covenant with God

⁴ for it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats take away sins. ⁵ For this reason, when he came into the world, he said: “Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; ⁶ holocausts and sin offerings you took no delight in. ⁷ Then I said, ‘As is written of me in the scroll, Behold, I come to do your will, O God.’”

Here the sacred author has quoted Psalm 40:6-7 in the Greek Septuagint form; which is how we know that the apostles used the Greek translation. The Hebrew form says “my ears you have pierced (or opened)” while the Greek says “a body you have prepared for me”. The meaning of the Psalm is that God prefers obedience to sacrifice. This is not a repudiation of ritual, but a statement of its inferiority relative to obedience. Jesus’ obedience was expressed by His willing offering of His Body in death.

⁸ First he says, “Sacrifices and offerings, holocausts and sin offerings, you neither desired nor delighted in.”

These may be meant to cover the four main types of offerings: sacrifices (peace offerings), offerings (cereal offerings), burnt offerings (holocausts), and sin offerings (includes guilt offerings).

These are offered according to the law.

According to the covenant with Moses. This statement prepares the hearer for the verse which follows.

⁹ Then he says, “Behold, I come to do your will.” He takes away the first to establish the second.

The “first” and “second” are references to covenants.

¹⁰ By this “will,”

Recall from our discussion last week that the Greek word for “will” is the same as that for “covenant” which is a better translation.

we have been consecrated through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. ¹¹ Every priest stands daily at his ministry, offering frequently those same sacrifices that can never take away sins.

A reference to the Levitical priesthood rather than the high priest. The emphasis here is not on the Day of Atonement ritual, but the daily ritual.

¹² But this one offered one sacrifice for sins, and took his seat forever at the right hand of God;

The contrast of the standing priest and the seated Christ has been used by some to argue that Jesus’ one sacrifice is offered once and is over, as opposed to the Catholic view of eternally being offered. It does not mean that the sacrifice is “over and done” but instead uses the imagery of Psalm 110 and is addressing the dual role (royal and priestly) which Jesus exercises. His being seated applies to his kingly status which he exercises in addition to his status as ministering priest

¹³ now he waits until his enemies are made his footstool.

See Psalm 110:1. The “waiting” is the time between Jesus’ enthronement and the parousia.

¹⁴ For by one offering he has made perfect forever those who are being consecrated.

Jesus has given his followers access to His Father – they share in His priestly consecration. Jesus’ priestly consecration of the Holy of Holies involved His obedience through suffering. Through His obedience He was brought to the full moral perfection of humanity. We are all called to follow His example and live His life (see Hebrews 9:14).

¹⁵ The holy Spirit also testifies to us, for after saying: ¹⁶ “This is the covenant I will establish with them after those days, says the Lord: ‘I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them upon their minds,’” ¹⁷ he also says: “Their sins and their evildoing I will remember no more.”

The sacred author quotes from Jeremiah 31:33-34 again. Jeremiah 31:31-34 appears in Hebrews 8:8-12 where it is the longest Old Testament quotation in the New Testament. Recall that when we studied this passage last week we looked also at Ezekiel 36:26 and the significance of writing on stone and on hearts; stone representing the Old Covenant and flesh representing the New Covenant. He speaks of the Holy Spirit in verse 15 because the Holy Spirit inspires the human writer.

¹⁸ Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer offering for sin.

This is the conclusion drawn from the last words of the prophecy just quoted. God no longer remembers the golden calf sins, because the people have been forgiven (and thus have had the sins forgotten). The fulfillment of this has come about through Jesus’ sacrifice which institutes the New Covenant.

¹⁹ Therefore, brothers, since through the blood of Jesus

Whenever we see the sacred writer use “therefore,” we should look to see what it is there-for. A conclusion is being drawn from the teaching just presented. The conclusion here is that the sacrifice of Jesus has forever consecrated the altar and has resulted in God forgiving and forgetting the sins of Adam and of the golden calf.

we have confidence of entrance into the sanctuary ²⁰ by the new and living way

Literally, “recently sacrificed and living way” indicating Christ is the way, the way has been recently opened, has been sacrificed, and is alive.

he opened for us through the veil, that is, his flesh,

Note the contrast between curtain and flesh (not body, but flesh). Both are an obstacle to entrance. This is a reference to the Eucharist. Recall in John 6:53-57 Jesus Himself emphasizes that you must “eat his flesh” to enter the kingdom. If one does not recognize that the Eucharist is Jesus’ body, they do not participate in the family meal which makes them a party to the New Covenant.

²¹ and since we have “a great priest over the house of God,” ²² let us approach with a sincere heart and in absolute trust, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed in pure water.

A reference to baptism which also cleanses all sin and makes a new person. We must attempt to stay this pure.

²³ Let us hold unwaveringly to our confession that gives us hope,

Our confession of faith “Jesus is Lord” (Romans 10:9; 1 Corinthians 12:3) that is made at baptism.

for he who made the promise is trustworthy. ²⁴ We must consider how to rouse one another to love and good works.

Completes the triad of theological virtues: faith (verse 22), hope (verse 23), and love. Note that good works is added which is evidence of living out these virtues. One is not compelled to do good works, but is instead impelled by the Holy Spirit to do them.

²⁵ We should not stay away from our assembly, as is the custom of some, but encourage one another,

In community, God’s family celebrates the Eucharist. Possibly the neglect of these gatherings was due to fear of persecution, but more likely it was simply another manifestation of the slackening of Christian fervor verging on apostasy against which this letter has been written. The assembly is a situation peculiarly suitable for the stimulation of love and mutual encouragement.

and this all the more as you see the day drawing near.

The day of judgement came for the Jews in A.D. 70 when the Temple was destroyed).

²⁶ If we sin deliberately after receiving knowledge of the truth,

Apostasy, as we will see in verse 29.

there no longer remains sacrifice for sins ²⁷ but a fearful prospect of judgment and a flaming fire that is going to consume the adversaries.

The consequences of this sin resemble those in Hebrews 6:4-8.

²⁸ Anyone who rejects the law of Moses is put to death without pity on the testimony of two or three witnesses.

The violation is evidently not just any sin, but specifically idolatry (see Deuteronomy 17:2-7).

²⁹ Do you not think that a much worse punishment is due the one who has contempt for the Son of God, considers unclean the covenant-blood by which he was consecrated, and insults the

spirit of grace?

This refers to the upper room and the Eucharistic liturgy. Those who purposely avoid professing their faith and going to Eucharist (verses 23-26). If they do this, Jesus' sacrifice is in vain for them.

³⁰ We know the one who said: "Vengeance is mine; I will repay," and again: "The Lord will judge his people."

Here he quotes Deuteronomy 32:35-36; the Song of Moses where he calls a curse down on Israel.

³¹ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. ³² Remember the days past when, after you had been enlightened,

Enlightenment is a reference to baptism. It wasn't until after they were baptized that the Eucharist was explained to catechumens.

you endured a great contest of suffering.

It is unknown what the nature of the persecution suffered after baptism was for these people but those of the Jerusalem church involved the death of some (Acts 8:1). Persecution under Nero was also brutal. The specific identity of the addressees is unknown, but after baptism their former Jewish friends probably shunned them.

³³ At times you were publicly exposed to abuse and affliction; at other times you associated yourselves with those so treated. ³⁴ You even joined in the sufferings of those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, knowing that you had a better and lasting possession.

See Hebrews 11:16. This passage refers to the heavenly Jerusalem.

³⁵ Therefore, do not throw away your confidence; it will have great recompense. ³⁶ You need endurance to do the will of God and receive what he has promised. ³⁷ "For, after just a brief moment, he who is to come shall come; he shall not delay. ³⁸ But my just one shall live by faith, and if he draws back I take no pleasure in him."

Quotes Habakkuk 2:3-4. Habakkuk has just complained there is no justice and that there is continued oppression. (Read Habakkuk 2:1-4 for context in which Hebrews uses this passage). A promise of salvation contingent on faithfulness.

³⁹ We are not among those who draw back and perish,

Those who return to the Old Covenant.

but among those who have faith and will possess life.

Those of the New Covenant.

Gospel - Mark 13:24-32

Today we also finish our study through the Gospel of Mark. The time is just before Holy Thursday and the Last Supper. This reading is an apocalyptic description and needs to be heard in conjunction with Mark 13:3-8 where Jesus is talking of the destruction of the temple (which occurred in A.D. 70):

^{13:3} As he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple area, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, ⁴ “Tell us, when will this happen, and what sign will there be when all these things are about to come to an end?” ⁵ Jesus began to say to them, “See that no one deceives you. ⁶ Many will come in my name saying, ‘I am he,’ and they will deceive many. ⁷ When you hear of wars and reports of wars do not be alarmed; such things must happen, but it will not yet be the end. ⁸ Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes from place to place and there will be famines. These are the beginnings of the labor pains.

Jesus now describes, in Old Testament images, something that is coming which requires Christians to prepare themselves in order to cope with it.

²⁴ “But in those days after that tribulation

A period of great tribulation not directly relatable to any specific time.

“We must not inordinately fix upon the chronology of what is said in Scripture, because frequently the Holy Spirit, having spoken of the end of the last times, then returns again to address a previous time, and fills up what had before been left unsaid. Nor must we look for a specific chronology in apocalyptic visions, but rather follow the meaning of those things which are prophesied” [Saint Victorinus of Pettau (ca. A.D. 280), *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 7].

the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, ²⁵ and the stars will be falling from the sky, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

The cosmic portents preceding the coming of the Son of Man echo Old Testament texts: Isaiah 13:10; Ezekiel 32:7; Amos 8:9; Joel 2:10,31; 3:15; Isaiah 34:4; Haggai 2:6,21. Nowhere in the Old Testament do these events precede the coming of the Son of Man. The list of portents is a way of saying that all creation will signal His coming. The same motif is also used in apocryphal books such as Enoch 80:4-7 and 2 Esdras 5:5.

²⁶ And then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in the clouds’ with great power and glory,

This description is taken from Daniel 7:13. This Son of Man is clearly Jesus however, not an angelic figure in human form.

“This could be taken in two ways: one, that He will come in the Church as in a cloud, as He continues to come now according to His word: ‘Hereafter you shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of the power of God and coming in the clouds of heaven’ (Matthew 26:64). He comes with great power and majesty because His greater power and majesty will appear in the saints to whom He will give great power, so that they may not be overcome by such persecution. The other way in which He will come will be in His body in which He sits at the right hand of the Father (Mark 16:19; Romans 8:34; Colossians 3:1), in which, also, He died and rose again and ascended into heaven” [Saint Augustine of Hippo (A.D. 418), *Letter to Hesychius*, No. 199, 41].

²⁷ and then he will send out the angels

The messengers of God.

and gather (his) elect

The elect (Deuteronomy 30:4; Isaiah 11:11, 16; 27:12),

from the four winds, from the end of the earth to the end of the sky.

Everywhere in the world.

²⁸ “Learn a lesson from the fig tree.

Not the fig tree He cursed (Mark 11:21), but a simple lesson in horticulture. The fig tree’s natural process of growth in spring and summer is compared with the sequence of events leading up to the coming of the Son of Man. When you see these signs, know that the Son of Man will come soon.

When its branch becomes tender and sprouts leaves, you know that summer is near. ²⁹ In the same way, when you see these things happening, know that he is near, at the gates. ³⁰ Amen, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place.

A generation is forty years. This was said in A.D. 30 and, forty years later, in A.D. 70 the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed. The Temple was a miniature of the Jewish concept of the construction of the world. Their world was destroyed.

Josephus, a first century Jewish historian, records the following when describing the use of catapults in the siege of Jerusalem: “*Now the stones that were cast were of the weight of a talent (75 pounds), and were carried two furlongs (1/4 mile) and farther. The blow they gave was no way to be sustained, not only by those that stood first in the way, but by those that were beyond them for a great space. As for the Jews, they at first watched the coming of the stone, for it was of a white color, and could therefore not only be perceived by the great noise it made, but could be seen also before it came by its brightness. Accordingly, the watchmen that sat upon the towers and gave them notice when the engine (catapult) was let go, and the stone came from it, and cried out in their own country language ‘THE SON IS COMING;’ so that those that were in its way stood off.*” [Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, 5.7.3(270-273)]. The translator’s footnote says “What should be the meaning of this signal or watchword, when the watchmen saw a stone coming from the engine, ‘THE SON

IS COMING,' or what mistake there is in the reading, I cannot tell. The manuscripts, both Greek and Latin, all agree in this reading and I cannot approve of any groundless conjectural alteration of the text." Whitson, William, *The Works of Josephus*, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 1987, page 710.

³¹ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. ³² "But of that day or hour, no one knows,

We must be vigilant and prepared at all times.

neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

This has been used by some as an argument against the divinity of Jesus. There is One God in three persons. The partition of duties/knowledge among the three persons is one of the reasons why the Trinity is called a mystery.

It is sometimes turned into a reproach against the only begotten God that He did not know the day and the hour. It is said that, though God, born of God, He is not in the perfection of divine nature, since He is subjected to the limitation of ignorance, namely, to an external force stronger than Himself, triumphing, as it were, over His weakness. The heretics in their frenzy would try to drive us to this blasphemous interpretation: that He is thus captive to this external limitation, which makes such a confession inevitable. The words are those of the Lord Himself. What could be more unholy, we ask, than to corrupt His express assertion by our attempt to explain it away? But, before we investigate the meaning and occasion of these words, let us first appeal to the judgement of common sense. It is credible, that He, who stands to all things as the author (see Hebrews 12:2) of their present and future, should not know all things? . . . All that is derives from God alone in its origin, and has in Him alone the efficient cause of its present state and future development. Can anything be beyond the reach of His nature, through which is effected, and in which is contained, all that is and shall be? Jesus Christ knows the thoughts of the mind, as it is now, stirred by present motives, and as it will be tomorrow, aroused by the impulse of future desires. . . . Whenever God says that He does not know, He professes ignorance indeed, but is not under the defect of ignorance. It is not because of the infirmity of ignorance that He does not know, but because it is not yet the time to speak, or in the divine plan to act. . . . This knowledge is not, therefore, a change from ignorance, but the coming of a fullness of time. He waits still to know, but we cannot suppose that He does not know. Therefore His not knowing what He knows, and His knowing what He does not know, is nothing else than a divine economy in word and deed" [Saint Hilary of Poitiers (between A.D. 356-359), *The Trinity*, 9,58-62].