



***Thirty third Sunday Ordinary Time 2006.***

***Daniel 12:1-3 Hebrews 10:11-18 Mark 13: 24-32***

The last readings of the church's year are taken from writings that speak of the "last days".

The first four verses from the section from Mark's gospel are taken directly from verses from the Jewish scriptures. Most scholars believe that Mark's gospel was written in the years following the destruction of the temple.

People had already witnessed an "end" time that was traumatic. Mark uses the memory to reflect on the original community's belief that the period between Jesus' death/resurrection and his coming in glory would be brief.

We know that the early belief was, that end-times would happen in the apostolic life-time but as years passed the community had to adjust its understanding of this belief. The traditional signs that scripture had used of the end of the world (cosmic disasters) were now to be understood as a pointing to the transitory nature of the world.

The communities at the end of the first century still believed in the concept of a fulfilment of Scripture and a recognition of Jesus' Lordship but they knew that their understanding was in process.

The concept of church, as a way of holding the memory, developed about this time. What we understand as church today, in terms of a community with structures and tradition, which came to be seen as a new religion, was not imagined by those who believed they would see "the return of Jesus in glory" in their lifetime.

The important aspect of this reading is what it means for us today. Over time we have learned and some have witnessed disasters that our early ancestors could never have imagined. There are some who greet each new disaster as a sign of the end of the world and even go to extraordinary steps to prepare for it. The clue to the evangelist's understanding, and our reading, lies in verse 32.

"As to the exact day or hour, no one knows it, neither the angels in heaven nor even the Son, but only the Father."

We are not to waste our time looking for signs or following those charlatans who promise to have been given special knowledge. We are to interpret the period of waiting as a new way of being spiritually focused. We are not to spend our days, "looking up to heaven" but to continue Christ's mission in an earth to be renewed.

The fig tree is to be our teacher. Every spring we observe a bare tree start to green. Leaves appear and we know that summer is on the horizon. As Spring is a prelude to Summer, and Autumn warns of Winter so we must not be complacent, imagining that life can be held in suspension.

Like seasons we have a short span of life, we must use our life profitably, not in financial terms but in terms of our baptismal commitment. Jesus showed us that a short life is not necessarily unprofitable and that our understanding of usefulness is not always God's understanding.

Perhaps this is a good time to reflect on the year in terms of our commitment to discipleship. We were "sent" to bring love to all that we touch.

To feed the hungry, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, visit the imprisoned, this essence of evangelisation.

To respond we must be awake!

Patricia Stevenson rsj.