

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B

GOSPEL

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Jesus said to his disciples: 'In those days, after the time of distress, the sun will be darkened, the moon will lose its brightness, the stars will come falling from heaven 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; then too he will send the angels to gather his chosen from the four winds, from the ends of the world to the ends of heaven.

'Take the fig tree as a parable: as soon as its twigs grow supple and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. So with you when you see these things happening: know that he is near, at the very gates. I tell you solemnly, before this generation has passed away all these things will have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

'But as for that day or hour, nobody knows it, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son; no one but the Father.'

(Mark 13:24–32)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- The language that Jesus uses here to describe the end times is called 'apocalyptic'. Apocalyptic writing was very common and popular from about the second century before Jesus' birth through to the second century after his death. The Bible contains many examples of this apocalyptic style, such as the Book of Revelation. It is a particular literary form, with special rules for interpretation, and is perhaps the most misunderstood style of writing in the Scriptures. It is highly symbolic and should never be read literally.
- The first Christian communities believed that the 'end times' and Christ's second coming were imminent. It was only after many years, when this did not eventuate, that the language of the second coming was tempered.
- It is generally accepted by scholars that Mark's Gospel was the first one written, probably about AD 65–70, thus reflecting this belief in the imminent second coming of Christ.

EXPLORING THE WORD

Mark's Gospel is drawing to a close. This is just about the last teaching of Jesus to the disciples before entering into the momentous events of his final days in Jerusalem. It is little wonder that Jesus is concerned that they understand something of the end times. Jesus uses the commonly accepted language of apocalypse, just as the Book of Daniel does in today's first reading. While this language sounds strange to our modern ear, we should not try to understand it in any literal or scientific sense. Instead we must focus on the message that Jesus is conveying: we need to live in anticipation of the end of our own lives and of human history. Only God knows when that hour is to be, but Jesus makes it clear that it will not take place until the gospel has been preached to the ends of the earth. Only then can the angels gather in the faithful from 'the four winds, from the ends of the world to the ends of heaven'.

By his words, Jesus teaches his disciples that they will live in the missionary time of the Church. They must spread the gospel (see Mark 13:10) and live in anticipation of that time when God will once again be Lord of all creation, when God's plan comes to fruition.

- What might the world look like if God were again 'Lord of all creation'?
- Do you ever contemplate your own death? What does the promise of eternal life mean to you?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- What helps you to live in an expectant and watchful way?
- 'My words will not pass away.' What words of Jesus stay with you most?
- What signs of growth, life, death or change do you see around you—in the natural world, your community, your family, yourself? Be attentive to change this week.
- In today's world there are many signs of chaos or disorder. What are some of those signs? What are these signs indicative of?
- We sometimes experience chaos and disorder in our own lives. Reflect on times when you felt things were happening around you that you could not control. Share your experiences.
- Use the response to the psalm as this week's prayer:

*Keep me safe, O God;
you are my hope.*

