



AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR
CHRISTIANITY AND CULTURE
WISDOM FOR THE COMMON GOOD

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time
6th Word Day for the Poor

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Listen at <https://soundcloud.com/frank-brennan-6/homily-131122>

The United Nations calculates that the world's population will reach 8 billion on Tuesday. The human population on the planet has doubled in just 48 years. Last Monday, Antonio Guterres, the Secretary General of the UN opened the COP27 conference in Egypt. He spoke apocalyptically when he said:

'This UN Climate Conference is a reminder that the answer is in our hands. And the clock is ticking. We are in the fight of our lives. And we are losing. Greenhouse gas emissions keep growing. Global temperatures keep rising. And our planet is fast approaching tipping points that will make climate chaos irreversible. We are on a highway to climate hell with our foot still on the accelerator.'¹

The politics and economics of climate change in a heavily populated world lifting so many people out of poverty through development is complex, daunting, and even depressing. What are we to do? How are we to respond? How do we deal with these dire predictions?

This is our last Sunday in Ordinary Time in the liturgical calendar so our readings take us to contemplation on end times. In today's gospel from Luke, Jesus predicts the destruction of the Temple. He also predicts that his followers will face a time of persecution and imprisonment. These two sets of predictions come before his third and final prediction – that the Son of Man will come in a cloud with power and great glory.

By the time Luke has written his gospel, the first two prophecies have come to pass. The Temple was destroyed back in 70 AD – probably 10-20 years before the writing of the gospel. Luke is also the author of the Acts of the Apostles which tells

¹ Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General's remarks to High-Level opening of COP27, 7 November 2022, available at <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2022-11-07/secretary-generals-remarks-high-level-opening-of-cop27>



many stories of persecution and imprisonment of Jesus' followers. The author is keen to buttress the credibility of Jesus' third and as yet unrealised prophecy. If the first two have already come to pass in the intervening 50-60 years, surely the other will too, but who knows when. The author is also keen that his readers accept that dire happenings like the destruction of the Temple and relentless persecution are not reasons for abandoning faith in Jesus as Messiah or for surrendering hope in the life to come.

It's as if those who are now predicting a climate catastrophe had already made predictions 50-60 years ago about other events such as the destruction of the World Trade Centre. Looking back on that catastrophic event that then occurred 20 years ago, we can only marvel at anyone who predicted it 30 or 40 years before. Being attentive to the prophets in our midst, we hear the tales and predictions of doom and gloom. We feel powerless. We even wonder how we can cope ourselves, let alone help anyone else or the defenceless planet.

Jesus' message is that there will be hard times, there will be unbearable suffering: - you will be persecuted, you will be hated, 'but not a hair of your head will be lost. Your endurance will win you your lives.'

Whatever the situation, we are not to lose hope because our horizon of meaning always lies beyond the present reality, including catastrophe and even death. The Son of Man will come in a cloud with power and great glory. 'When these things begin to take place, stand erect, hold your heads high, because your liberation is near at hand.'

Our Christian hope is real but it may be unrealised in this life. For unbelievers, it is therefore a fiction or a fantasy. For us believers, it is the ground of our being, fortifying us to confront the evils of the day, whatever the short term outcomes of the conflict or catastrophe. With hope in a life to come, we Christians can join with others in sustained efforts to relieve present suffering and predicted planetary catastrophe. Believing in a life to come, we do not conclude that the present life does not matter; we affirm that truth, goodness and beauty in our present reality are to be sought here and now, as the sure signs of all that is to come.

In the past, I have not been much moved by Old Testament readings such as the one from the prophet Malachi in today's first reading. But Mr Gutierrez' words of foreboding in Egypt this week brought those prophetic words to life, on the eve of the birth of the 8 billionth person on our fragile planet:



For the day is coming now, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and the evildoers will be like stubble. The day that is coming is going to burn them up, says Yahweh Sabaoth, leaving them neither root nor stalk. But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness will shine out with healing in its rays; you will leap like calves going out to pasture.

Contemplating last things at the end of the liturgical year, we keep alive the hope in our hearts - the hope that will be fertilised during Advent, flowering at Christmas. But for the moment, we need to carry the enormity of the dire predictions that are all about us, deciding practically what we will do and praying for the endurance to await the Son of Man coming in his power and glory.

When paralysed by fear and doubt in face of the enormity of all that confronts us, let's call to mind the simple gesture of fourth century bishop, St Martin of Tours, whose feast we celebrated during the week. Before he became a Christian, Martin was a soldier posted to France during a cold winter. One night he encountered a hungry, freezing beggar at the gates. He cut his cloak in two and gave half to the beggar. Pope Francis reminds us on this World Day of the Poor: 'The poor, before being the object of our almsgiving, are people, who can help set us free from the snares of anxiety and superficiality.'²

The Lord comes to rule the world with justice.

For the Lord comes,
he comes to rule the earth.
He will rule the world with justice
and the peoples with fairness.

The Lord comes to rule the world with justice.

² Pope Francis, Message for 6th World Day for the Poor, 13 November 2022, available at <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/poveri/documents/20220613-messaggio-vi-giornatamondiale-poveri-2022.html>