

Thirty-third Sunday Per Annum (C)
November 13, 2016.

Beware that you are not led astray (Lk. 21:8).

The sacred liturgy again today directs our attention to the *eschaton*, the teaching about the end time when Our Lord will bring to fulfillment the kingdom which He has established. This too is a dogma of the faith that we affirm in the recitation of the Creed: *He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and His Kingdom will have no end.* But Our Lord cautions us: *'Beware that you are not led astray; for many will come in my name and say, 'I am he!' and, 'The time is near!' Do not go after them'* (Lk. 21:8). In the face of uncertainties and confusion, wars and rumors of war it is not surprising that there is a more than passing interest in prophecies. Our world is anxious for prophecy and there is no end to messages and alleged prophecies, some of which are wrongly attributed to canonized Saints. Again, we do well to heed the words of Our Lord: *And then if any one says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'Look, there he is!' do not believe it. False Christs and false prophets will arise and show signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect. But take heed; I have told you all things beforehand* (Mk. 13:21-23). In their simple brevity, Our Lord's words tell us all we need to know. The world will end. The end will be preceded by a great apostasy (that is to say, a great falling away) and a great affliction. After that Our Lord's Second Coming will take place and of His Kingdom there shall be no end.

Sacred Scripture however, also warns us about another danger: the dismissive pride of scoffers. In his Second Epistle, St. Peter wrote, *First of all you must understand this, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own passions and saying, 'Where is the promise of his coming?'* (2 Pet. 3:3-4). In the midst of this confusion, dismissiveness on the one hand and obsessive concern on the other, we must cling to Christ, keep our conscience clear (Cf. 1Tim 1:19) and seek refuge in the Immaculate Heart of Mary, whose prophetic words at Fatima are most worthy of belief, for they speak both of divine punishment and of conversion of hearts. In our Judeo-Christian tradition prophets are not seen as fortune tellers who predict the future but as messengers sent by God to call His people to conversion, integrity of life and submission to the law and holy will of God. The prophets always call us back to a right relationship with God and by consequence with one another.

We venerate our Lady as Queen of Prophets, and it is most significant that Our Lady appeared at Fatima in Portugal in 1917 to deliver her call to conversion. In 1646, King John IV of Portugal and all his people had promised their fidelity to Our Lady under the title of the Immaculate Conception and since that time she had been proclaimed Queen and Patroness of Portugal: for this reason, Portuguese kings did not wear a crown, since it was reserved exclusively for Our Lady. This is more than a quaint point of history or piety. It expresses a desire to imitate the disposition of Our Lady before God: *Behold, I am the servant of the Lord.* The king too is God's servant. The horrors that humanity has experienced in the almost hundred years since these apparitions are in essence, the direct result of a humanity that seeks to displace God; a humanity that seeks even to pervert the natural law of God. And this attempt to displace God has with evident success, even been attempted in God's Church. The Venerable Pope Pius XII whose pontificate was particularly marked by the events of Fatima made this astonishing prophecy about the upheavals the Church would experience.

He spoke these words while still a Monsignor, serving at the Vatican: *I am worried by the Blessed Virgin's messages to Lucy of Fatima. This persistence of Mary about the dangers which menace the Church is a divine warning against the suicide that would be represented by the alteration of the faith, in her liturgy, in her theology and her soul.... I hear around me innovators who wish to dismantle the Sacred Chapel, reject her ornaments and make her feel remorse for her historical past.* His biographer notes that at this point in the conversation, the gaze of the Pope became supernatural, and endowed with an irresistible mystical force; and in answer to an objection from a Cardinal, he said: *A day will come when the civilized world will deny its God, when the Church will doubt as Peter doubted. She will be tempted to believe that man has become God. In our churches, Christians will search in vain for the red lamp where God awaits them. Like Mary Magdalene, weeping before the empty tomb, they will ask, 'Where have they taken Him?'* (Roche, *Pie XII Devant L'Histoire*, p. 52-53).

A day will come when the civilized world will deny its God. That day has come and it is long in passing. This is why we must heed the words of our Lady to Sister Lucia of Fatima: *My Immaculate Heart will be your refuge and the way that will lead you to God.* The seers at Fatima were given to see Our Lady's Immaculate Heart surrounded by thorns, outraged by the sins of humanity and seeking reparation for them. Years later, in 1925 our Lady appeared to Sr. Lucia, by then a religious, and said, *Look, my daughter, at My Heart, surrounded with thorns with which ungrateful men pierce Me at every moment by their blasphemies and ingratitude. You at least, try to console me.* During this same apparition Our Lord Himself said, *Have compassion on the Heart of your Most Holy Mother, covered with thorns, with which ungrateful men pierce it at every moment, and there is no one to make an act of reparation to remove them.*

I say to you today, *Look to the Heart of Our Lady. Strive to find your refuge in her Immaculate Heart because from her you will learn to love God and your neighbour perfectly. Make reparation for your sins and those of others. Above all, do not be deceived by those who would have you believe that our Faith has changed. If our ancestors were wrong in their day, then we are wrong in ours.* The unchanging truth of God abides for ever; and He desires that *all be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth* (1 Tim. 2:4). In every age of the Church and in every place, including ours, there are two perennial questions that every Christian must answer and do so correctly. Both are questions posed by Our Lord Himself: *But who do you say that I am?* (Mk. 8:29) and, *When the Son of Man comes will he find faith on earth?* (Lk. 18:8). True devotion to Our Lady will guard the integrity of our faith, and we will confess Him Lord and Saviour.

The statue of the Immaculate Heart of Mary will remain in our sanctuary for the centenary of the Marian Apparitions at Fatima. Her prominent presence is an invitation to each one of us to deepen our love for her and for Our Lord in the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. Here the red lamp does mark the place where God awaits us; calling us to conform our hearts to the Heart of God Himself. With Our Lady, in the embrace of her loving Immaculate Heart we learn to adore the living God especially in His hidden presence in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. Here, we learn to make reparation for the outrages, sacrileges and indifference by which He is offended; and we learn to imitate God's tender love for poor sinners. Here, we will not be led astray; and I will not lead you astray.