

Extraordinary Form – 24th Sunday after Pentecost

Ave Maria Catholic Church, Sunday, Nov. 26th, 2023. Fr. David M Vidal

Col. 1: 9–14

Brethren, we do not cease praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding to live in a manner worthy of the Lord, so as to be fully pleasing, in every good work bearing fruit and growing in the knowledge of God, strengthened with every power, in accord with his glorious might, for all endurance and patience, with joy giving thanks to the Father, who has made you fit to share in the inheritance of the holy ones in light. He delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Matth. 24: 15–35

At that time, Jesus said to his disciples: When you see the desolating abomination spoken of through Daniel the prophet standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then those in Judea must flee to the mountains, a person on the housetop must not go down to get things out of his house, a person in the field must not return to get his cloak. Woe to pregnant women and nursing mothers in those days. Pray that your flight be not in winter or on the sabbath, for at that time there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will be. And if those days had not been shortened, no one would be saved; but for the sake of the elect, they will be shortened. If anyone says to you then, ‘Look, here is the Messiah!’ or, ‘There he is!’ do not believe it. False messiahs and false prophets will arise, and they will perform signs and wonders so great as to deceive, if that were possible, even the elect. Behold, I have told it to you beforehand. So if they say to you, ‘He is in the desert,’ do not go out there; if they say, ‘He is in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it. For just as lightning comes from the east and is seen as far as the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be. Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.

Immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming upon the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a trumpet blast, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

Learn a lesson from the fig tree. When its branch becomes tender and sprouts leaves, you know that summer is near. In the same way, when you see all these things, know that he is near, at the gates. Amen, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

The Anxieties of the World

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The gospel of this Sunday's liturgy describes the great tribulations that follow the trials and persecutions of those who belong to Christ and the desolating abomination of the sacred. The gospel portrays the final chapter of the history of the world, the last trumpet blast, and the second coming of Christ. This world will pass away, and a new homeland will be given to those who love God.

Let us examine ourselves and ask: Are we expecting the fulfillment of Jesus's promise? What do our hearts tell us when we hear that this world will end?

The image is terrifying! When you hear that "*The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky . . . and everyone on earth will mourn,*" it is difficult not to be afraid. Our natural response is to be anxious. In our uneasiness, we may ask the Lord, "When will this happen?"

Now, is this the best disposition we are called to have? In his first letter to the Corinthians (7:32), St. Paul exhorts us: "*I want you to be free from anxieties.*"

Love is the foundation of our anxieties. Since we love our family and friends, the neighborhood where we were raised, the home where we lived, the school we attended, and so many other things, we naturally feel anxious about the possibility of losing anyone or anything.

However, our anxieties must be tempered in light of our expectations according to faith. Jesus tells us: "*Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If there were not, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be,*" (Jn. 14:1-3). Jesus encourages us: "*I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete,*" (Jn. 15:11).

How do we compare all the anxieties of this world with the complete joy that Jesus offers us? It is not easy to overcome the anxieties of this world, especially when this world takes root in our desires and expectations.

Father Faber describes the anxieties of this world in this way: "*There is a hell already upon earth; there is something which is excommunicated from God's smile. It is not altogether matter, nor yet altogether spirit. It is not man only, nor Satan only, nor it is exactly sin. It is an infection, an inspiration, an atmosphere, a life, a coloring matter, a fashion, a taste... an impersonal but a very recognizable spirit: **The spirit of the world.***"

The spirit of the world is generally seen in three ways:

1. The spirit of the world is seen in the spreading of false principles that must be believed as if they were a new creed.

Principles like “enjoy your life!” which typically means taking delight in the pleasures of life, or the comforts of life, riches, fame, and power. Unfortunately, the “enjoy your life” worldly principle is not directed towards a life of purity and truth, a life of dedication and fidelity.

The world also tells us: “Be yourself,” forgetting that in ourselves, there are so many things that we need to reshape or even dispose of. The world denies that original sin exists, and that we need to “deny ourselves” and accept a “new life” in Christ.

Finally, the world teaches: “Be free,” and with this principle, the world implies that we must have no boundaries; we should do whatever “we want.” Freedom becomes the lack of restraint and not the precious gift of choosing what is good and right.

2. The spirit of the world is seen in the mockery and persecution of those who want to live a holy life.

The book of Proverbs 29:27 says: *“An abomination to the wicked, one whose way is straight.”* The life of the just is a reproach to the world. The life of the just really goes against the grain of the world.

For this reason, the world mocks those who are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, those who are meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, those who are merciful, those who are pure of heart, and those who are peacemakers. The world not only mocks them, but it also persecutes them.

3. The spirit of the world is seen in the scandals and bad examples.

The world lifts people up to the highest levels of corruption, robbery, lies, infidelity, and impurity. But after those people arrive at the peak of what they think is their glory, the world throws them down into the pit of death. That is the way the world repays those who put their trust in it.

Bad examples are hard to bear, especially when they come from those who should be examples of virtue, for the responsibility or for the authority that they have over others. No wonder Jesus warns: *“Woe to the man through whom scandal does come!”* (Matt. 18:7).

If we want to be free of these anxieties, we must uproot from within ourselves the spirit of the world, and acquire the mind and the spirit of Christ, who lived in this world but was not of this world, who walked in this world but fought against it.

Among the several remedies that we must use to uproot the spirit of the world from our hearts, we should consider the following:

1. Avoid dangerous occasions.

"He who loves danger will perish in it." The world is filled with occasions of great danger for our spiritual life and salvation. Avoid them! Some things are evil in themselves, and we must avoid them like poisonous snakes. Other things can be dangerous for us, either because of our weakness or our past sins, and therefore, we need to avoid them as well. And there are even licit things, that sometimes will be convenient to avoid because, as St Paul tells us, *"Not all things that are lawful are prudent."*

2. Disregard human respect.

Being concerned about "what people will say" is not worthy of a Christian. Our only concern must be to do God's will, no matter the cost. People will say many things, but what matters is what God says. St. Paul warns us that *he is not a disciple of Christ who would be concerned about pleasing men* (Gal. 1:10). Obviously, he is not teaching us to be unkind, but he is simply telling us that we must love everyone in God, for God, and not against God.

3. Live by faith.

St. John tells us: *"This is the victory that overcomes the world: our faith,"* (1 John 5:4). Faith enables us to see things through the eyes of God, so to speak. A strong faith will allow us to walk through great dangers unharmed. It is right; we will still suffer trials and temptations and feel the heat of the fight, but faith will help us walk through it.

The gospel of this Sunday's liturgy teaches us: *"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away."* Let us ask to be free from worldly anxieties, lifting our desires and hopes to that life promised by Jesus, knowing that His words will never pass away.
Amen