

Homily for the 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

I'd like to begin today with some words from an Italian bishop, which he wrote once upon a time: "Perhaps you are anxious, brothers and sisters, at the fact that we hear constantly of the tumult of wars and the onsets of battles. Perhaps your love is still more anxious since these are taking place in our times. The reason is the closer we are to the destruction of the world, the closer we are to the kingdom of the Savior."

Tumult, wars, destruction, here and now. No doubt we have cause for real worry and anguish in our world today. All we have to do is look around the globe to see wars being fought by various forces in Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan, where Christians and others are being mercilessly persecuted. There seems to be no end to ongoing terrorism throughout the Middle East, northern Africa, and around the world. And there's the ever-present concern over nuclear weapons being developed in Iran.

But then again, we don't have to look half-way across the globe to find things that stir up fear. We have our own problems here at home. Take for example the deep division in our own nation, which has become so visible from the most recent elections. Or maybe the enduring economic instability weighs on us: "With the huge deficit, we fear what might come. We worry about what will happen if the nation goes bankrupt." Or perhaps we worry about the situation with health care and what the rising costs of premiums might mean for me and my family. With such present-day difficulties facing us, such fear really isn't that unreasonable.

But getting back to that quote from the Italian bishop I began with, perhaps you would imagine that he was writing those words several years ago, or even just the other week. But actually, they were written by St. Maximus, the former Bishop of Turin, Italy, who died sometime during the 5th century – that’s the early 400s. Yes, I guess, unfortunately, some things never seem to change.

Further still, our Gospel today from St. Luke was also written for people who were living in a time of great fear and distress themselves. In fact, just a short while after Jesus’ Resurrection from the dead, Christians began to be persecuted by lots of people – from the Jews to the emperors of the Roman Empire. And as a result, many of those early Christians fled the Holy Land to Syria and Antioch and neighboring countries, where they were strangers and aliens. Some of them even abandoned their faith because of the strong discrimination in order to better blend in. Others just gave up, wondering why Jesus hadn’t returned yet to bring the fullness of His Father’s kingdom of justice and peace.

And so to this bleak outlook – both ours and the people of his time – St. Luke responds. The evangelist reminds them as he shares Jesus’ words that there will come false prophets and deceivers – people who will try to lead you astray. There will come wars and earthquakes, famines and plagues. All of these things will happen, “but not a hair on your head will be destroyed [for] by your perseverance you will secure your lives.” In other words, all these predicted trials and calamities are things that had already happened in the lives of those early Christians facing such persecution. And despite it all, they were still alive, and God was still with them. The world might have been changing, becoming very different, but He would be their steady rock – their stronghold – enabling them to persevere.

Of course the same is true for us. Such natural disasters and various types of wars, haters and deceivers have arisen in our very own time and day too. But God still has not abandoned us, His Church – and He never will! We must remember that no matter what happens on the world stage or here at home, or in our personal lives – whether economically, socially, emotionally or spiritually, our God is with us. Even today, in the Eucharist we receive, Jesus comes to us so humbly and intimately, in order to nourish and strengthen us. And He sends us the Holy Spirit from on high to daily inspire, encourage and direct us. This is the Good News that God is always with us because He totally and personally loves us. And He will never abandon us no matter what because He is Emmanuel – God with us – forever. God bless you.