

## THIRTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME - NOVEMBER 16, 2025

Over the centuries, people have combed through Jesus' words in today's gospel for clues to when the end of the world might come. When Jesus says that "nation will rise against nation", they have thought that maybe some of the great wars of history might have been a precursor to the end of the world. Jesus also speaks of earthquakes and plagues, so some have thought that natural disasters and pandemics might signal that the end is near. People have even interpreted phenomena in the sky like comets or planetary alignments as indications of the Second Coming of Jesus.

All these speculations might be interesting, but there is one huge problem with it. Even though Jesus is speaking in language that sounds apocalyptic, He is not talking at all about the end of the world. Instead, He is talking about the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. That is the question He is addressing when the disciples asked Him, "Teacher, when will this happen?" The Temple in Jerusalem was a huge stone structure. It was hard for them to imagine it ever being destroyed, just as it might be hard for us to imagine that the world will ever come to an end. For that to happen, something truly devastating would have to take place.

About 40 years after Jesus spoke these words to His disciples - in 70 AD - His prophecy came true. The Jews revolted against Roman rule, and as a result, the Roman army under Titus completely tore down and burned the Temple. The only thing remaining to this day is the Western Wall which was a retaining wall for the Temple Mount. What seemed impossible took place within the lifetimes of many of the people who would have heard Jesus' words.

Why would God have allowed that to happen? The Temple was where God's chosen people gathered to worship and offer sacrifice. Jesus loved the Temple. He called it God's house, and when He thought it was being disrespected by the money changers, He threw them out. So, why would God allow His house to be destroyed by a pagan army?

The reason is that the Temple was no longer necessary. Before Jesus, sins could only be forgiven by sacrificing animals according to the law of Moses. Now that Jesus offered Himself on the cross, no other sacrifice for sins was needed. We are forgiven by the blood of Jesus on the cross. It is no longer necessary to go to the Temple in Jerusalem to offer lambs, goats, and bulls to have our relationship with God made right again.

The other reason that the Temple is no longer necessary is that Jesus' Church is built of living stones. You and I and all believers make up the Church. The Temple in Jerusalem is no longer needed as "God's House" because God now lives in everyone who believes in His Son, Jesus Christ, and is baptized. When two or three of us gather in the name of Jesus, He is present among us. We still have buildings that we gather in. But our identity does not come from the brick and mortar of the Church building, but the Spirit of God living among us. We are the Temple of God.

The Temple in Jerusalem could be destroyed because it was made out of stone. However, the new Temple, the Church of Jesus Christ, can never be destroyed because it is built up by the Holy Spirit and is made up of people. Jesus promises that no power can ever destroy the Church He builds up on the rock of Saint Peter - not even the full power of Hell. That does not mean that the powers of this world will not try to destroy us. Throughout history, many emperors and dictators have tried to stamp out Christianity. But they've all been unsuccessful because no one can tear down what God Himself is building up.

That brings us to the other prediction that Jesus makes. Before the Temple in Jerusalem is destroyed, His disciples will be persecuted and put to death. In fact, every apostle except Saint John was killed for spreading the gospel. Saint James was beheaded by Herod. Saint Peter was crucified upside down. His brother, Saint Andrew, was crucified on an X shaped cross. Saint Thomas had his skin peeled off. Along with them, many other Christians were thrown into prison and executed because of their faith, just as Jesus predicted.

But something powerful happened as a result. Just as Jesus predicted, the imprisonments and trials were an opportunity for more people to hear about the faith and come to believe. The Acts of the Apostles tells us that Saint Paul, because he was imprisoned, had the opportunity to preach the gospel to Festus, the Roman governor of Judea. During his trial, he also preached to King Agrippa. While they were not convinced by his testimony, it is likely that many others who heard him were.

There is no doubt that the persecution of Jesus' disciples was one of the reasons that Christianity spread so rapidly in the early centuries of the Church. While they were in prison, Christians were able to witness to their faith to both the guards and the other prisoners. Many soldiers were impressed by their courage and became Christians themselves. Their example of love and forgiveness for their persecutors also inspired many people to come to faith in Jesus Christ. And eventually, the Roman Empire was won over to Christianity.

Jesus says something curious at the end of the gospel: "You will be hated by all, but not a hair of your head will perish" (Lk 20:17-18 NRSV). How can Jesus say "not a hair of your head will perish" when so many people were put to death? It is because, even though soldiers can kill our bodies, they cannot kill our souls. They can only put an end to our earthly life, not our heavenly one. If we are faithful to the end - never denying Jesus no matter what tortures we might be threatened with - then our eternal life will be assured. That is the life that matters most.