

Homily Proper 27, 2025

Year C

Job 19:23-27a

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2nd Thessalonians 2:13-3:5

St. Luke 20:27-38

In the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

With the coming and going of the Feast of All Saints last Sunday, the winding down of the Church Year not only continues its inexorable flowing downstream to its conclusion, but it actually accelerates, picking up both speed and intensity. The end is in sight. What was once the light at the end of the tunnel is no longer at the end of the tunnel, that is in the back of the tunnel. It is rushing toward the front of the tunnel. It is coming at us rather than we at it. If we're paying attention, we'll find this a bit unnerving to say the least. A hymn for All Saints puts it this way. "We feebly struggle, they in glory shine." But with the light relentlessly drawing nearer, the text of the hymn can be switched to "they in glory shine while we still feebly struggle," as though we are standing on a beach where all the water, having receded toward the horizon and now becomes the tsunami rushing in.

After today, there is only one more Sunday before the last one which is called Christ the King. Christ the King is about the finality that Christians call the Parousia. The Parousia is the conclusion to temporality and its replacement with eternity. The Bible supplies metaphors for what is now beyond human comprehension. Such metaphors are "heaven," "the New Jerusalem," the images portrayed in the Book of Revelation, as well as the Prophet Isaiah with the Peaceable Kingdom, and "On this mountain the Lord of Hosts will make for all people a feast of fat things. And he will destroy on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations."

In 1st Corinthians, St. Paul speaks of how "God will be all in all." God will be everything to everyone, without doing violence to any. We can

know what the Parousia is, but how it can be is incomprehensible. This does not mean it is impossible for us to know, but instead is something we will go on coming to know forever.

In the Marriage Liturgy in the *Book of Common Prayer*, it says that one of the purposes for marriage is "the procreation of children and their nurture in the love of the Lord." When I prepare couples for marriage, I tell them that in Christianity procreation is not the same thing as reproduction. Animals reproduce their own kind; they make more of the same thing. Human beings do not reproduce, they procreate. That is, they cooperate with God in the creation of a new human being whose destiny is to share God's life forever.

This sets us on a path. The Jesuit priest and paleontologist Teilhard de Chardin describes it this way. "Lord, since with every instinct of my being, and through all the change of fortunes of my life, it is You whom I have ever sought. You whom I have set at the heart." Another Jesuit, the late Cardinal Carlo Martini, one-time Patriarch of Venice, wrote: "God and Father of mercies, light and source of all good, Lord of history and of the universe, the goal of the entire human journey." This is what the Parousia is about: the goal of the entire human journey, to the one whom we must ever set at the heart.

There is the You whom we are to set at the heart, and the we who feebly struggle to do so. There are two scenes in the movie *A Man for All Seasons* that when I see them, I shudder to my core. First is Cardinal Wolsey meeting with Sir Thomas More in the dead of night. “England needs and heir. What are you going to do about it?” “Let the dynasty die with Henry and there will be dynastic wars again with barons rampaging the country from end to end.” It is the tragedy of an impossible situation, with two people on opposite sides and both being right. I look at this realizing that it will be close to three centuries before a complete change of government can take place without violence. Then later is the scene of King Henry VIII sitting with Thomas More. “I have no son.” And then, “I will have no opposition.” It is said quietly yet firmly, “no opposition,” before exploding into a rant.

Unfortunately, inevitably, and inescapably there will be opposition. That is what is at work in today’s Scripture readings. We open with the Old Testament and the Book of Job in the heat of an argument between Job and his friends. To reprise the story, a figure called “Satan” appears before God and challenges God’s assertion that Job is a good and upright servant of the Lord. This is not yet Satan as will later be thought of as the Devil: red skin, horns, a tail, and a pitchfork. That is centuries in the future. Here, Satan is an accuser, an adversary saying that Job is only good because God has been good to him. Take all the good away and see what happens. So, unmitigated disaster befalls Job who loses everything to within an inch of his own life.

The argument is this: God rewards the righteous punishes the wicked. “You, Job must have done something to deserve this.” Job says, “No, not at all.” Is he being like the Pharisee in the Temple along side the tax collector from two weeks back? Job says, “I want to have the last word. And I want my last word to be permanent and unchanging, inscribed on a rock with an iron pen.” Remember, in Judaism at this point in time there is no real sense of an afterlife. There is not much of one in Judaism now. Ideas of an afterlife with reward for the righteous and punishment for wicked will come through Persian sources at the end of Israel’s exile in Babylon.

There is opposition in the reading from 2nd Thessalonians. St. Paul proclaims Christ who is coming again to bring the Kingdom of God in fullness. He is telling the Thessalonians to hold on to this and not deviate from it. But the Thessalonians are also hearing others say that Christ has already come. Last week we heard about how almost from the beginning of the Christian community there were those who saw it as an opportunity, not to advance the Kingdom of God, but instead their own interests. The Letters to the Thessalonians are the earliest writings of the New Testament, preceding the Gospels by decades. This same problem St. Paul speaks of today will show up in the Gospels too with Jesus himself warning about people making false claims about the time and place and process of the arrival of the Kingdom; something that has continued through the centuries to our own time. Finally in the Gospel, how do you solve the problem of death? Jesus’s opponents are a group within the Judaism of his time called Sadducees. They were based in and ran the Jerusalem Temple. They held that the only authoritative source for Jewish belief was the Pentateuch, considered to be the first five books of Moses. These books said nothing about any life but this one. The only continuity after this life was the memory of one’s descendants.

Here is the problem for Abraham who as yet, like Henry VIII had no son, and like Henry VIII sought a work around in an offspring from a woman other than his wife. The answer to the problem for a man who died without children was for his brother to impregnate the widow to create through that child, continuity

for the deceased man. So, their question to Jesus through reducing the argument to absurdity made some sense. In the life after this one, whose wife would she be?

So, here we are. As the hymn said last week, “we feebly struggle.” We feebly struggle to make some kind of sense of it all with impossible situations, with conflicting ideas that not just between right and wrong, but right and right. Job’s friends say that God is righteous, so the problem is you. Job says yes, God is righteous and so am I. So God, what are you doing? I want an answer. God does answer Job out of the whirlwind laying out the limits of human knowledge and the no limits to God’s absolute and unlimited transcendence that exceeds everything. Job gets everything back and more seeing his descendants to the fourth generation before “dying an old man full of days.”

Most people find the ending unsatisfying. Yet it really is the best that the Old Testament can do. Thessalonians, like Job asserts there are limits to what humans can know. Particularly humans cannot know the time, place, or the how of the coming of the Kingdom. We can only know that it will, and that existential struggles both individually and collectively will precede it. This is finally anchored by the last thing Jesus says in today’s Gospel. The resurrection is already present in the Old Testament Jesus says because Moses calls the Lord, “the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Which is true, but only after God said to Moses, “I am the God of Abraham, and I am the God of Isaac, and I am the God of Jacob.” Meaning that because he is, as in I AM, then they are. That is why Jesus says, “He is not God of the dead, but of the living.” Why? Because, “all live to him.”

In other words, from God’s point of view, Teilhard de Chardin’s, words are reversed. Since with every instinct of his being, that is God, and through all the change of fortunes of our lives, it is each one of us that God has ever sought. Because God has set each of us at the heart, we feebly struggle, yet can, in the end, successfully set him at the heart. God not of the dead but of the living for all live to him.

Well then, how should we move forward toward what is coming, God who will be all in all, God who will be everything to everyone without doing violence to any? There is a wonderful collect in the *Book of Common Prayer* that can be used at funerals about “God whose days are without end and whose mercies cannot be numbered.” It asks that he make us aware of life’s uncertainty and its ending. It asks that the Holy Spirit lead us in holiness and righteousness all our days. It speaks of serving God in our generation, in the time and place and among the people we live now. And that having done that and then being gathered to our ancestors, we may possess the following things. First, the testimony of a good conscience. Second, be in communion with your holy Church, which means the mystical Body of Christ, which the *Book of Common Prayer* calls, “the blessed company of all faithful people.” The prayer asks that we may have the confidence of a certain faith.” That’s interesting. How can you put the words “certain” and “faith” right next to each other in the same sentence? It is not our cleverness, nor own conviction, but rather under the rubric of “grace perfects nature.” Grace dilates our mind’s natural perception into an expanded ability to behold and then believe that the Christian vision for human life is indeed credible. And finally, that in the comfort, meaning strength not relaxation, of a “religious and holy hope, that we are in favor with you our God, and in perfect charity with all the world.” The prayer ends with, “All this we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord.” That is “You whom we have ever sought, You whom we have set at the heart.”