

## THE DAILY GOSPEL

Monday, November 1, 2004  
All Saints Day

**1st Reading: Rev 7:2-4, 9-14**

**2nd Reading: 1 Jn 3:1-3**

**Gospel: Mt 5:1-12**

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain. He sat down and his disciples gathered around him. Then he spoke and began to teach them:

Fortunate are those who are poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Fortunate are those who mourn, they shall be comforted.

Fortunate are the gentle, they shall possess the land.

Fortunate are those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they shall be satisfied.

Fortunate are the merciful, for they shall find mercy.

Fortunate are those with a pure heart, for they shall see God.

Fortunate are those who work for peace, they shall be called children of God.

Fortunate are those who are persecuted for the cause of justice, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Fortunate are you, when people insult you and persecute you and speak all kinds of evil against you because you are my followers. Be glad and joyful, for a great reward is kept for you in God. This is how this people persecuted the prophets who lived before you.

### Commentary

*St. Augustine wrote: We say of proud people that they are swollen with pride and puffed up. By poor in spirit then are understood the humble, those who have not a puffed up spirit. These early writers loved to dwell on the paradox that the way to hell is pride, while the way to heaven is humility. Up and down are reversed. The way to go up is to go down. It began with the self-emptying (the kenosis) of Christ. In one of the most profoundly affecting passages of the New Testament St. Paul wrote, Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human form. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death even death on a cross (Phil 2:5-8). Buddhists use the expressions Buddha mind, and Buddha nature. This passage from St. Paul expresses for Christians the Christ mind or the Christ nature. Think also of the statement, I live now, not I, but Christ lives in me (Gal 2:20).*

*Today we are celebrating the billions of nameless saints who have lived since the time of Jesus and who have never been beatified or canonized. I think more often of them than of the official saints. They are not lesser beings, they are just less known. Those whose law is within themselves walk in hiddenness wrote an ancient Chinese sage. The Christ-nature is our law within. The poor in spirit, the meek all who lived by the Beatitudes express it in countless different ways.*

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Tuesday, November 2, 2004

All Souls Day

**1st Reading: Is 25:6, 7-9**

**2nd Reading: 1 Cor 15:20-24, 25-28**

**Gospel: Lk 14:15-24**

Upon hearing these words, one of those at the table said to Jesus, Happy are those who eat at the banquet in the kingdom of God!

Jesus replied, A man once gave a feast and invited many guests. When it was time for the feast he sent his servant to tell those he had invited to come, for everything was ready. But all

alike began to make excuses. The first said: Please excuse me. I must go and see the piece of land I have just bought. Another said: I am sorry, but I am on my way to try out the five yoke of oxen I have just bought. Still another said, How can I come when I have just married?

The servant returned alone and reported this to his master. Upon hearing the account, the master of the house flew into a rage and ordered his servant: Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.

The servant reported after a while: Sir, your orders have been carried out, but there is still room. The master said: Go out to the highways and country lanes and force people to come in, to make sure my house is full. I tell you, none of those invited will have a morsel of my feast.

### **Commentary**

*JESUS used the metaphor of a banquet to symbolize the joy of heaven. That joy, already anticipated, is not some kind of solitary satisfaction, but shared with countless others. The significance of sharing a meal is that it makes us brothers and sisters: what makes someone your brother or sister but the fact that you once shared the same milk? Jesus raised the meaning of eating till it became a symbol of everything we know about God and ourselves.*

*In today's reading we hear Jesus using this metaphor once again. Whether by design or because it happened to be in sequence, we are reading it on the feast of All Souls. We are brother and sister to all the dead. We are seated around the table of God the Father of us all.*

*We are not a perfect house of sweet children, we are a bedraggled family, the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame. But there is love: more of it, perhaps, than if we were all able to meet our own expectations. Food is a symbol of love. Love is invisible, and so it needs a visible channel. The child first experiences its mother as a source of food, and through the food as a source of love. Your mother has given you her very self to drink; you have life from her body, even after birth. Love flows through food. Those who went before us were not perfect, but how heartless it would be to demand that your brother or sister should be perfect! Something perfect would stand apart, but the dead are bound to us with love, around the noisy table of the Body of Christ.*

**Wednesday, November 3, 2004**  
**31<sup>st</sup> Week in Ordinary Time**

**1st Reading: Phil 2:12-18**

**Gospel: Lk 14:25-33**

One day, when large crowds were walking along with Jesus, he turned and said to them, If you come to me, without being ready to give up your love for your father and mother, your spouse and children, your brothers and sisters, and indeed yourself, you cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not follow me carrying his own cross cannot be my disciple.

Do you build a house without first sitting down to count the cost to see whether you have enough to complete it? Otherwise, if you have laid the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone will make fun of you: This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.

And when a king wages war against another king, does he go to fight without first sitting down to consider whether his ten thousand can stand against the twenty thousand of his opponent? And if not, while the other is still a long way off he sends messengers for peace talks. In the same way, none of you may become my disciple if he doesn't give up everything he has.

### **Commentary**

*ARE Christians extremists? Yes, if you mean that we are told to take the most important thing in the world and put ourselves wholly behind it. Moderation doesn't mean never going to any extreme; it means not going to false extremes. There is no limit to the effort we are to put into living the Christian life.*

*Other creatures put everything they have into what they do. Yesterday I had a close view of a bird singing. What energy he put into it! He was singing, body and soul; there was nothing in him that wasn't singing. He wasn't singing because it was expected of him, nor because he wanted to be popular, nor because he was drunk. He was singing, pure and simple. I was made aware immediately of how I hang back in the very act of doing things, how I put only part of myself into what I do. This is more or less what we call normal. How hard it is to be pure and simple! Every creature can be our teacher.*

*When we were little children we lived fully! We didn't think about ourselves. But soon the fatal limiting began. We began to be self-conscious and to worry about ourselves, we began to have a distinctive character. It is a kind of armor around one; the more character you have, the more you are limited. There's a kind of infinity about a small child everything is welcome, everything is possible. So when we meet someone like Jesus who is like a child (and who said we should be like children) we think he's an extremist. No, he's just alive! That's what makes him different from me!*

**Thursday, November 4, 2004**  
**31<sup>st</sup> Week in Ordinary Time**

**1st Reading: Phil 3:3-8**

**Gospel: Lk 15:1-10**

Tax collectors and sinners were seeking the company of Jesus, all of them eager to hear what he had to say. But the Pharisees and the scribes frowned at this, muttering. This man welcomes sinners and eats with them. So Jesus told them this parable:

Who among you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, will not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and seek out the lost one till he finds it? And finding it, will he not joyfully carry it home on his shoulders? Then he will call his friends and neighbors together and say: Celebrate with me for I have found my lost sheep. I tell you, just so, there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one repentant sinner than over ninety-nine upright who do not need to repent.

What woman, if she has ten silver coins and loses one, will not light a lamp and sweep the house in a thorough search till she finds the lost coin? And finding it, she will call her friends and neighbors and say: Celebrate with me for I have found the silver coin I lost! I tell you, in the same way there is rejoicing among the angels of God over one repentant sinner.

**Commentary**

*It's rare for a sheep to do anything by itself. How did that one sheep get lost? Sheep nibble themselves astray. It's not that they choose to get lost; rather they discover that they are lost.*

*We human beings are more complicated: we sometimes deliberately strike out on our own; we even think at times that it's our very nature to be alone. And that kind of thinking even becomes fashionable in some periods of history. Sartre, who said hell is other people, was hugely popular in his time! There's a strange contradiction there. A book on psychology that I looked at recently had all this packed into one sentence! Man is essentially alone and lonely, and from this isolation he cannot be saved but through the fact that he belongs to another human being. Ought to make up his mind! If man is essentially alone, then belonging to another human being must be a denial of his essence; and if he can truly belong to another human being, then he is not essentially alone.*

*We're not essentially alone. We are social beings, but not in the way that bees or ants are social: a hive of bees or a swarm of ants behaves like one large individual. We have the capacity to be alone to a degree. We are both social and individual: if we are essentially anything we are essentially both.*

*We get lost when we think we're essentially alone. Much of psychology still has this bias, inherited from Freud. Freud's training and background disposed him to assume a basic antagonism between individual and society.*

*More than ever we need a Good Shepherd who can recall us to our true nature.*

**Friday, November 5, 2004**  
**31<sup>st</sup> Week in Ordinary Time**

**1st Reading: Phil 3:17 4:1**

**Gospel: Lk 16:1-8**

At another time Jesus told his disciples, There was a rich man whose steward was reported to him for fraudulent service. He summoned the steward and asked him: What is this I hear about you? I want you to render an account of your service for it is about to be terminated.

The steward thought to himself: What am I to do now? My master will surely dismiss me. I am not strong enough to do hard work, and I am ashamed to beg. I know what I will do: I must make sure that when I am dismissed, there will be some people to welcome me into their house.

So he called his master's debtors one by one. He asked the first who came: How much do you owe my master? The reply was: A hundred jars of oil. The steward said: Here is your bill. Sit down quickly and write there fifty. To the second he put the same question: How much do you owe? The answer was: A thousand measures of wheat. Then he said: Take your bill and write eight hundred.

The master commended the dishonest steward for his astuteness. For the people of this world are more astute in dealing with their own kind than are the people of light.

**Commentary**

*ASTUTENESS only barely makes it as a virtue; one may wonder if it's a virtue at all. It consorts with words like shrewd and crafty, wily and cunning. It's concerned mainly with one's own interests, as the story in today's gospel well illustrates. It's a virtue that suits the people of this*

world, but what are the people of light to find in it? How are we to be astute in our Christian life?

A very successful farmer told me once that the secret of his success was attention to detail. I think it needs spelling out. If attention to detail meant attention only to small things, leaving the big things unattended, he would not have been a success. In fact he was able to take big business risks, as I saw, and to look at the big picture; but in everything big and small alike he looked at the details. It was his habit of mind.

That is something we could take with us. If that farmer ran his business in the way that many run their lives, he would be bankrupt long ago, his livestock dead, and most of his farm overgrown with brambles and weeds. If a farmer fails to plant crops it doesn't follow that nothing will grow. Lots of things will grow: nature is prodigal. Weeds will grow. Likewise something is always growing in my life. Life doesn't come to a stop. I may give up the practice of my faith, but then my land is thrown open to everything that the wind blows over the fence.

**Saturday, November 6, 2004**  
**31<sup>st</sup> Week in Ordinary Time**

**1st Reading: Phil 4:10-19**

**Gospel: Lk 16:9-15**

Jesus said to his disciples, And so I tell you: use filthy money to make friends for yourselves, so that when it fails, these people may welcome you into the eternal homes.

Whoever can be trusted in little things can also be trusted in great ones; whoever is dishonest in slight matters will also be dishonest in greater ones. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling filthy money, who could entrust you with true wealth? And if you have not been trustworthy with things which are not really yours, who will give you the wealth which is your own?

No servant can serve two masters. Either he does not like the one and is fond of the other, or he regards one highly and the other with contempt. You cannot give yourself both to God and to Money.

The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and sneered at Jesus. He said to them, You do your best to be considered righteous by people. But God knows the heart, and what rises high among humans is loathed by God.

**Commentary**

*THIS reading is a collection of attempts to raise the tone of the parable of the unjust steward. Some of them are so desperate that they actually make the opposite point. For example, If you have not been trustworthy in handling filthy money, who could entrust you with true wealth? But in the parable the owner didn't blame the unjust steward, he commended him. A more recent, and equally desperate, attempt was to suggest that there must have been a scribal error: that the word translated as with should have been and not. That would make things nice again, Make friends and not the Mammon of iniquity. Everything back in its right place. Some critic, commenting on Shakespeare's lines, Books in the living brooks, sermons in stones and good in everything, suggested that the text was corrupt: that it should have read, Stones in the living brooks, sermons in books . Everything back in its place! Critics are sometimes far too clever.*

*But we can still take the messages of these early Christians, even if they have little to do with the parable.*

*Take this one, You cannot serve God and wealth. It is common experience that those who have most want most. This must be because they don't really have what they have: it doesn't fulfill them, it only baits them into further accumulation. Greed is a bottomless pit and nothing will ever fill it. Many misers even live very poor lives in order to die rich! Whatever oversees your whole life, right into the arms of death, must be a religion. It's the other religion, God's main rival.*

**Sunday, November 7, 2004**  
**32<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**1st Reading: 2 Mac 7:1-2, 9-14**

It happened that seven brothers were arrested with their mother. The king had them scourged and flogged to force them to eat the flesh of a pig which was prohibited by the Law.

One of them, speaking in behalf of all, said, What do you want to find out from us? We are prepared to die right now rather than break the law of our ancestors.

At the moment of his last breath, he said, Murderer, you now dismiss us from life, but the King of the world will raise us up. He will give us eternal life since we die for his laws.

After this, they punished the third. He stuck his tongue out when asked to, bravely stretched forth his hands, and even had the courage to say: I have received these limbs from God, but for love of his laws I now consider them as nothing. For I hope to recover them from God. The king and his court were touched by the courage of this young man, so unconcerned about his own sufferings.

When this one was dead, they subjected the fourth to the same torture. At the point of death, he cried out, I would rather die at the hands of men, and wait for the promises of God who will raise us up; you, however, shall have no part in the resurrection of life.

**2nd Reading: 2 Thes 2:16- 3:5**

May Christ Jesus our Lord who has loved us, may God our Father, who in his mercy gives us everlasting comfort and true hope, strengthen you. May he encourage your hearts and make you steadfast in every good work and word.

Finally, brothers and sisters, pray for us that the Word of God may spread rapidly and be glorified everywhere as it was with you. May God guard us from wicked and evil people, since not everyone has faith. The Lord is faithful; he will strengthen you and keep you safe from the Evil One. Besides, we have in the Lord this confidence that you are doing and will continue to do what we order you. May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.

**Gospel: Lk 20:27-38**

Some Sadducees arrived. These people claim that there is no resurrection and they asked Jesus this question, Master, in the Scripture Moses told us: If anyone dies leaving a wife but no children, his brother must take the wife, and the child to be born will be regarded as the child of the deceased man. Now, there were seven brothers; the first married a wife, but he died without children; and the second and the third took the wife; in fact all seven died leaving no children. Last of all the woman died. On the day of the resurrection, to which of them will the woman be wife? For the seven had her as wife.

And Jesus replied, Taking husband or wife is proper to people of this world, but for those who are considered worthy of the world to come and of resurrection from the dead, there is no more marriage. Besides, they cannot die for they are like the angels. They too are sons and daughters of God because they are born of the resurrection.

Yes, the dead will be raised, and even Moses implied it in the passage about the burning bush, where he calls the Lord *the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob*. For he is God of the living and not of the dead, and for him all are alive.

**Commentary**

*ON June 2 we had the same scene with the Sadducees, but as recounted by Mark.*

*How does one hold belief in the resurrection? With the mind alone? If so, then it would be no more than what Pascal called the big bet (le grand pari). It goes as follows: You can't really lose by believing in it, for if there is life after death, you will not be disappointed; but if there is not, again you will not be disappointed because to experience disappointment you would have to exist! But Jesus did not come to proclaim the Safe Bet; he came to proclaim the Good News. When he said as he died on the cross, Father, into your hands I commit my spirit, he was not taking a bet on the resurrection; he was entrusting his whole being, body and soul, to the Father. Unless I am trying to do that, as far as I am able, I don't really believe in the resurrection neither that of Jesus nor of anyone else.*

**Monday, November 8, 2004**  
**32<sup>nd</sup> Week in Ordinary Time**

**1st Reading: Tit 1:1-9**

**Gospel: Lk 17:1-6**

Jesus said to his disciples, Scandals will necessarily come and cause people to fall; but woe to the one who has brought it about. It would be better for that one to be thrown into the sea with a millstone around the neck. Truly this would be better for that person than to cause one of these little ones to fall.

Be careful. If your brother offends you, rebuke him and if he is sorry, forgive him. And if he offends you seven times in a day but says to you seven times: I'm sorry, forgive him.

The apostles said to the Lord, Increase our faith. And the Lord said, If you have faith even the size of a mustard seed, you may say to this tree: Be uprooted and plant yourself in the sea, and it will obey you.

## **Commentary**

*In the previous chapters Jesus faced those who were outside his immediate community the crowds, the Scribes, the Pharisees but now he faces his disciples. They will be the leaders of the new community, and he tells them they are not to be stumbling blocks to others. The little ones are not children but the poor of the Beatitudes (Lk 6:20-23): those who will be in the care of his disciples. In Matthew also the little children are adults, because they believe in me (Mt 18:5). Certainly Jesus had compared the true disciple to a child, but then he went on to talk not about children but about disciples.*

*The millstones in this passage, then, are for Church leaders, if they fail those in their charge! They are not to scandalize their flock. They are to have the courage to point out wrongdoing, but at the same time they are to be ready to forgive wrongdoing against themselves even to forgive the same person seven times a day. That means endlessly. How could we ever live up to that? they seem to ask, Lord increase our faith!*

*And when the leaders have done all that, they are to say, We are merely servants; we have done no more than our duty (verse 10). It is not surprising that St. Thomas à Kempis (1380-1471) wrote, It is much safer to be in a subordinate position than in authority.*

**Tuesday, November 9, 2004**

### **Dedication of the Basilica of St. John the Lateran**

**1st Reading: Ezk 47:1-2, 8-9, 12**

**2nd Reading: 1 Cor 3:9-11, 16-17**

**Gospel: Jn 2:13-22**

As the Passover of the Jews was at hand, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the Temple court he found merchants selling oxen, sheep and doves, and money-changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the Temple court, together with the oxen and sheep. He knocked over the tables of the money-changers, scattering the coins, and ordered the people selling doves, Take all this away and stop turning my Father's house into a marketplace!

His disciples recalled the words of Scripture: *Zeal for your House devours me as a fire.*

The Jews then questioned Jesus, Where are the miraculous signs which give you the right to do this? And Jesus said, Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up. The Jews then replied, The building of this temple has already taken forty-six years, and you will raise it up in three days?

Actually, Jesus was referring to the temple of his body. Only when he had risen from the dead did his disciples remember these words; then they believed both the Scripture and the words Jesus had spoken.

## **Commentary**

*St. John Lateran is a church in Rome, not a person. In the words carved in front, it's the mother of all churches. It was the first Christian church building. The ground for it was donated by the Emperor Constantine early in the 4th century. It was rebuilt four or five times! The Vandals wrecked it in the 5th century, an earthquake did the same in the 9th, two fires destroyed it at different times in the 14th, and there was little left of the original when the interior was redone in the 17th. The statues that line the center isle are so massive in scale that you feel like Zacchaeus as you walk there. That's the first connection I see between today's reading and the Lateran basilica!*

*The intended connection probably was I must stay at your house today. A church is a symbol of a believing community, just as a house is a symbol of the self. Tauler wrote, We must go into our house, our souls. When we go into our house and look for God there, God in His turn looks for us and ransacks the house. He behaves just as we do when we are searching for something, throwing aside one thing after another until we find what we are looking for. This is just what He does to us. When we have gone into our house, when we have searched for Him in the depths of our souls, God comes and searches for us and ransacks our house.*

**Wednesday, November 10, 2004**

**32nd Week in Ordinary Time**

**1st Reading: Tit 3:1-7**

**Gospel: Lk 17:11-19**

On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus was passing along the border between Samaria and Galilee, and as he entered a village, ten lepers came to meet him. Keeping their distance, they called to him, Jesus, Master, have pity on us! Then Jesus said to them, Go and show yourselves to the priests. Now, as they went their way, they found they were cured. One of them, as soon as he

saw he was cleansed, turned back praising God in a loud voice, and throwing himself on his face before Jesus, he gave him thanks. This man was a Samaritan.

Was no one found to return and give praise to God but this alien? And Jesus said to him, Stand up and go your way; your faith has saved you.

#### **Commentary**

*I tell you, Jesus once said, if these people were to stay silent the very stones would cry out! This was his reply to the Pharisees who wanted him to stop his disciples from praising God at the top of their voices (Lk 19:37-40). The enthusiasm of the Pharisees was for the Law, not for God. Praising God is a favorite theme in Luke's gospel: see 2:20; 5:25, 26; 7:16; 13:13; 18:43; 23:47; Acts 4:21; 21:20. In today's reading Jesus did not complain that the other nine lepers had failed to return to thank him. He said, No one has come back to give praise to God, except this foreigner. The first bit of trouble that Jesus drew on himself was in his home town, and he did it by praising foreigners. In the present case the praise of God came once again from a foreigner, a Samaritan leper. If praise of God does not come from expected quarters it begins to come from unexpected ones.*

*Referring this to ourselves (and who else should we refer it to?) we can say: if the Church doesn't feed people spiritually in the present time, others will do so. Many are doing so already. The Church will last to the end of time, but not necessarily in this or that country, or in its present condition. The Church is not the Kingdom but a means to the Kingdom. We just have to do our work humbly, in the knowledge that if we don't do it the very stones will.*

**Thursday, November 11, 2004**  
**32<sup>nd</sup> Week in Ordinary Time**

**1st Reading: Phlm 7-20**

**Gospel: Lk 17:20-25**

The Pharisees asked Jesus when the kingdom of God was to come. He answered, The kingdom of God is not like something you can observe and say of it: Look, here it is! There it is! See, the kingdom of God is among you.

And Jesus said to his disciples, The time is at hand when you will long to see one of the glorious days of the Son of Man, but you will not see it. Then people will tell you: Look there! Look here! Do not go, do not follow them. As lightning flashes from one end of the sky to the other, so will it be with the Son of Man. But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this people.

#### **Commentary**

**You** can say of a church or of any and every Church organization Look, here it is! There it is! But the Kingdom, to which they are meant to guide us, is always more. We can never say, This is it! if by that we mean, This is all there is. The whole Church itself is a pilgrim now on earth (*Lumen Gentium*); we are on the way, we have not yet arrived.

Yet the Kingdom of God is not far away; it is among you. The Greek word *entos* can mean among or within. Since ancient times there has been uncertainty about this verse, some translating it as the Kingdom of God is within you, others translating it as the Kingdom of God is among you. The same ambiguity still exists today, but there seems to be a general preference for among. Many who love the idea of interiority are disappointed with this. But look at it this way: among still means within within the *community*. The Kingdom (the Presence) is not only within the individual; it is within the great assembly of God's people; it is the presence of Christ in the Church. This may be a challenge to an individualistic kind of faith, but it is right that such a faith should be challenged; faith draws us sometimes kicking and screaming! beyond ourselves. It does not draw us away from ourselves, as if it were some kind of alienation, but beyond ourselves. In the Liturgy, I means more than just one individual.

All this says that the Kingdom of God embraces us as individuals and as community. In the way that a meal does both things, the Eucharist feeds us as individuals and as community. Our Christian faith speaks to the tortured relationship between individual and society. (

**Friday, November 12, 2004**  
**32<sup>nd</sup> Week in Ordinary Time**

**1st Reading: 2 Jn 4-9**

**Gospel: Lk 17:26-37**

Jesus said to his disciples, As it was in the days of Noah, so will it be on the day the Son of Man comes. Then people ate and drank; they took husbands and wives. But on the day Noah

entered the ark, the flood came and destroyed them all. Just as it was in the days of Lot: people ate and drank, they bought and sold, planted and built. But on the day Lot left Sodom, God made fire and sulfur rain down from heaven which destroyed them all. So will it be on the day the Son of Man is revealed.

On that day, if you are on the rooftop, don't go down into the house to get your belongings, and if you happen to be in the fields, do not turn back. Remember Lot's wife. Whoever tries to save his life will lose himself, but whoever gives his life will be born again.

I tell you, though two men are sharing the same bed, it may be that one will be taken and the other left. Though two women are grinding corn together, one may be taken and the other left.

Then they asked Jesus, Where will this take place, Lord? And he answered, Where the body is, there too will the vultures gather.

#### **Commentary**

*THIS passage is famously difficult. It is hard to know what Jesus is saying, except that we cannot tell when the day of the Son of Man will come. The imagery is drawn from Old Testament prophecy; all the cosmic convulsions are there, as in Amos and Isaiah. That day seems to mean the day on which he will return in glory.*

*The emphasis is on the suddenness and the newness of it. It will disrupt the normal routines of eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. It will even make your most familiar companions look like strangers. When there is a cataclysm of some kind, people remember vividly what they were doing just as it struck. Those normal routines are seen now from a different perspective: from high in the air, as it were, rather than from the familiar ground.*

*Though we are largely at a loss when it comes to understanding this passage, its urgency is good for us, no doubt. Perhaps we become too complacent, too detached, too knowing. The impact of Kierkegaard's writing in his own world (19th century Denmark) was explosive: he castigated his age as an age without passion, with no values, an age that reduces everything to ideas. It was said of Karl Barth, the 20th century Protestant theologian, that his impact on his contemporaries was like a bomb exploding in their back garden. He stressed the wholly otherness of God. We make God a kind of private ineffectual daydream or a monthly or annual liability like rent or tax. We make God part of our life, even though God cannot be part of anything; God can only be whole. Alas, we should have more fire in our bellies.*

**Saturday, November 13, 2004**  
**32<sup>nd</sup> Week in Ordinary Time**

**1st Reading: 3 Jn 5-8**

**Gospel: Lk 18:1-8**

Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should pray continually and not lose heart. He said, In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor people. In the same town was a widow who kept coming to him, saying: Defend my rights against my opponent. For a time he refused, but finally he thought: Even though I neither fear God nor care about people, this widow bothers me so much I will see that she gets justice; then she will stop coming and wearing me out.

And Jesus explained, Listen to what the evil judge says. Will God not do justice for his chosen ones who cry to him day and night even if he delays in answering them? I tell you, he will speedily do them justice. Yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?

#### **Commentary**

*THERE was a corrupt judge there was a widow. It is Jesus telling a story. She kept pestering the judge until she got justice. Widows were always penniless, and therefore of slight interest to a corrupt judge. But this one was persistent. She will wear me out! said the judge. Or, as another translation has it, she will pester me to death.*

*Sometimes our prayer becomes so polite and tame that we can hardly believe in it ourselves. Prayer has been called an hour of truth, but it can become the place where we tell big lies even to ourselves! A good test of the truthfulness of your prayer is to put it in one word. We are too clever by half, too rational and too evasive.*

*I sometimes use clay when giving retreats. It is a wonderful substance for simplifying us! Try to express in clay your fears, your pain, your hopes, your joy... you will find it impossible to put in any evasions, any conditions, any subordinate clauses of any kind! Clay is just a main clause! To say something in clay is to make a direct statement and to leave it there. In its simplicity it is like the cry of an animal. Would to God our prayer could always be so simple and truthful!*

**Sunday, November 14, 2004**  
**33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**1st Reading: Mal 3:19-20**

The day already comes, flaming as a furnace.  
On that day all the proud and evildoers  
will be burned like straw in the fire.  
They will be left without branches or roots.  
On the other hand the sun of justice  
will shine upon you who respect my Name  
and bring health in its rays.  
You will come out leaping like fattened calves.

**2nd Reading: 2 Thes 3:7-12**

You know how you ought to follow our example: we worked while we were with you. Day and night we labored and toiled so as not to be a burden to any of you. We had the right to act otherwise, but we wanted to give you an example.

Besides, while we were with you, we said clearly: If anyone is not willing to work, neither should that one eat. However we heard that some among you live in idleness busybodies, doing no work. In the name of Christ Jesus our Lord we command these people to work and earn their own living.

**Gospel: Lk 21:5-19**

While some people were talking about the Temple, remarking that it was adorned with fine stonework and rich gifts, Jesus said to them, The days will come when there shall not be left one stone upon another of all that you now admire; all will be torn down. And they asked him, Master, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?

Jesus then said, Take care not to be deceived, for many will come claiming my title and saying: I am he, the Messiah; the time is at hand. Do not follow them. When you hear of wars and troubled times, don't be frightened; for all this must happen first, even though the end is not so soon.

And Jesus said, Nations will fight each other and kingdom will oppose kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, famines and plagues; in many places strange and terrifying signs from heaven will be seen. Before all this happens, people will lay their hands on you and persecute you; you will be delivered to the Jewish courts and put in prison, and for my sake you will be brought before kings and governors. This will be your opportunity to bear witness.

So keep this in mind: do not worry in advance about what to answer, for I will give you words and wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict.

You will be betrayed even by parents, and brothers, by relatives and friends, and some of you will be put to death. But even though you are hated by all for my name's sake, not a hair of your head will perish. Through perseverance you will possess your own selves.

**Commentary**

*I once caught myself thinking, I really must live in the Now but not now! Apparently it's an old trick the mind plays on us. St. Augustine prayed, Lord, make me chaste but not yet! We would like to do things gradually, but that's self-deception; it's a way of not doing anything, because anything that's done is done now. A recovering alcoholic told me that he once saw a large notice in a bar, Free drink here tomorrow! He could scarcely believe his luck. He found his way to the same bar the next day, and there it was again: Free drink here tomorrow! His thinking wasn't very clear, so he asked the barman whether it was true. Perfectly true! said the barman. But when will it be available? he asked. Tomorrow! said the barman, pointing to the notice. On his way home he went into a library and looked up the word tomorrow in a dictionary! It said, the day after today. But that's crazy! he said, there's no day after today! Then he said to me in all simplicity, Tomorrow must be the only word in the English language that has no meaning! He had learnt it the hard way.*

*When we really want something there's no tomorrow. When there's danger, waiting disappears, time disappears. We invent time when we want to get out of something. When we have problems we don't want to face we put them in the recycle bin called tomorrow. Nobody ever changed his or her life tomorrow.*

*We have a lot of fun reading about people who predicted that the world was about to end. But in a way they were all right: the world does end every moment.*

**Monday, November 15, 2004**  
**33rd Week in Ordinary Time**

**1st Reading: Rev 1:1-4; 2:1-5**

**Gospel: Lk 18:35-43**

When Jesus drew near to Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the road, begging. As he heard the crowd passing by, he inquired what it was, and they told him that Jesus of Nazareth was going by. Then he cried out, Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me! The people in front scolded him, Be quiet! but he cried out all the more, Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!

Jesus stopped and ordered the blind man to be brought to him, and when he came near, he asked him, What do you want me to do for you? And the man said, Lord, that I may see! Jesus said, Receive your sight, your faith has saved you. At once the blind man was able to see, and he followed Jesus, giving praise to God. And all the people who were there also praised God.

**Commentary**

*THE* verse just preceding this passage runs as follows, *They [the Twelve] could make nothing of this; what he said was quite obscure to them, they had no idea what it meant. Luke seems to be laboring the spiritual blindness of the Twelve. The story of the blind beggar gives us a visible metaphor for it.*

*A blind man is one who sees nobody, and a beggar is one whom nobody sees. This man was both, a blind beggar: he should not have been part of any story, he should have fallen clean through the net. There is a haunting poem, Egyptian beggar by Terence Tiller:*

his crushed hand,  
as inexpressive as a bird's face, held  
out like an offering, symbol of the blind,  
he gropes our noise for charity .  
Souls  
and body's terrible humility,  
stripped year by year a little barer, wills  
nothing: he claims no selfhood in his cry  
his eyes  
*white pebbles blind with deserts*

*Terrible metaphor for spiritual blindness: when I read it again I had to go back to Luke's story, though I wanted to push on to tomorrow .*

**Tuesday, November 16, 2004**  
**33rd Week in Ordinary Time**

**1st Reading: Rev 3:1-6, 14-22**

**Gospel: Lk 19:1-10**

When Jesus entered Jericho and was going through the city, a man named Zaccheus was there. He was a tax collector and a wealthy man. He wanted to see what Jesus was like, but he was a short man and could not see because of the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed up a sycamore tree. From there he would be able to see Jesus who had to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, Zaccheus, come down quickly for I must stay at your house today. So Zaccheus hurried down and received him joyfully.

All the people who saw it began to grumble and said, He has gone to the house of a sinner as a guest. But Zaccheus spoke to Jesus, The half of my goods, Lord, I give to the poor, and if I have cheated anyone, I will pay him back four times as much. Looking at him Jesus said, Salvation has come to this house today, for he is also a true son of Abraham. The Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost.

**Commentary**

*ZACCHAEUS* responded very gallantly to Jesus. Matthew, another tax collector, left his tax business to follow Jesus. Then too we remember the story of the tax collector at the back of the Temple, and how he went home at rights with God (Lk 18:14). They were a hated class of people, but they improve dramatically when seen through the eyes of Jesus!

*We hope it's true of us all. People generally make the harshest judgments on themselves. If you are such a person, it will do you good to read this paragraph from the 14th-century mystic, Julian of Norwich:*

*Human judging is mixed because of the different things we see sometimes it is good and understanding, sometimes harsh and distressing. Where our judgment is good and understanding it belongs to God's justice; where it is harsh and distressing our good Lord Jesus corrects it by his mercy and grace through the power of his holy Passion, and so makes it conform to his true*

*justice . Sinners sometimes deserve God's blame and wrath yet I could see neither of these in God. So my longing was greater than I can express.*

**Wednesday, November 17, 2004  
33rd Week in Ordinary Time**

**1st Reading: Rev 4:1-11**

**Gospel: Lk 19:11-28**

Jesus was now near Jerusalem and the people with him thought that God's reign was about to appear. So as they were listening to him, Jesus went on to tell them a parable. He said, A man of noble birth went to a distant place to have himself appointed king of his own people, after which he would return. Before he left, he summoned ten of his servants and gave them ten pounds. He said: Put this money to work until I get back. But his compatriots who disliked him sent a delegation after him with this message: We do not want this man to be our king.

He returned, however, appointed as king. At once he sent for the servants to whom he had given the money, to find out what profit each had made. The first came in and reported: Sir, your pound has earned ten more.

The master replied: Well done, my good servant. Since you have proved yourself capable in a small matter, I can trust you to take charge of ten cities. The second reported: Sir, your pound earned five more pounds. The master replied: Right, take charge of five cities.

The third came in and said: Sir, here is your money which I hid for safekeeping. I was afraid of you for you are an exacting person; you take up what you did not lay down and reap what you did not sow.

The master replied: You worthless servant, I will judge you by your own words. So you knew I was an exacting person, taking up what I did not lay down and reaping what I did not sow! Why, then, did you not put my money on loan so that when I got back I could have collected it with interest?

Then the master said to those standing by: Take from him that pound, and give it to the one with ten pounds. They objected: But, sir, he already has ten!

I tell you: everyone who has will be given more; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. As for my enemies who did not want me to be king, bring them in and execute them right here in my presence.

So Jesus spoke, and he went on ahead of them, on his way to Jerusalem.

**Commentary**

*THIS is Luke's reworking of the parable of the talents in Mt 25:14-30. The moral is the same, everyone who has will be given more; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away.*

*Imagine this: a mountain stream, dancing down between the stones, full of freshness and music and light. But a small volume of it begins to think, Why am I constantly losing my boundaries, giving myself away to the rest of this water? Let me claim my rightful boundaries and not mix with all this flood! It pours itself out by the side of the stream, forming a small pool by itself; suddenly there is great peace and quiet for it, no dizzying movement, no give and take. Some days go by in peace, but then the algae begin to grow and the water slowly becomes clouded and dirty. After a week it's a stinking puddle, hardly able to put up with itself. Things get worse and worse, and one suicidal day it thinks about pouring itself back into the stream. I may as well, it said; my life is useless to me anyway. It pours itself back into the stream, sure in its mind that it is losing everything. But suddenly all the light and movement and music begin for it again! The isolated self, the stinking puddle, had found life again. There is no life without spending oneself, risking oneself, giving oneself away.*

**Thursday, November 18, 2004  
33rd Week in Ordinary Time**

**1st Reading: Rev 5:1-10**

**Gospel: Lk 19:41-44**

When Jesus had come in sight of the city, he wept over it and said, If only today you knew the ways of peace! But now your eyes are held from seeing. Yet days will come upon you when your enemies will surround you with barricades and shut you in and press on you from every side. And they will dash you to the ground and your children with you, and leave not a stone within you, for you did not recognize the time and the visitation of your God.

**Commentary**

*In the verse just before this reading, the people were singing and shouting for joy. Suddenly a change of mood: Jesus himself is weeping. (Luke's gospel is noted for these contrasts: the Beatitudes and the woes, the two in the Temple, the rich man and Lazarus.) Jesus' prophecy in today's reading is composed entirely of quotations from Old Testament prophets: Jeremiah, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Hosea. He was not the first to grieve over Jerusalem; nor was he the last. But somehow we froze him in that mood of sadness. There are no pictures of Jesus filled with joy as he must have been. If one of the fruits of his Spirit is joy (Gal 5:22), then he himself must have been filled with deep joy.*

*We speak of two kinds of depression: endogenous and reactive. The first is born inside you, and is therefore very hard to be rid of. The second is a reaction to something sad that happens, and as the cause passes away so will the depression. We should speak of two corresponding kinds of joy. Real joy is endogenous; it's the natural state (and also the supernatural). The other is superficial and passing, it depends on things and events that you can't really control. I feel sure that the joy of Jesus was endogenous, and his sadness reactive! His was the fundamental kind of joy that didn't need to be constantly fuelled by happy events. What freedom!*

**Friday, November 19, 2004**  
**33rd Week in Ordinary Time**

**1st Reading: Rev 10:8-11**

**Gospel: Lk 19:45-48**

Jesus entered the Temple area and began to drive out the merchants. And he said to them, God says in the Scriptures: *My house shall be a house of prayer: but you have turned it into a den of robbers.*

Jesus was teaching every day in the Temple. The chief priests and teachers of the Law wanted to kill him and the elders of the Jews as well, but they were unable to do anything, for all the people were listening to him and hanging on his words.

**Commentary**

*Two days ago the reading began, Jesus was now near Jerusalem, yesterday's began, Jesus had come in sight of the city, and today's begins, Jesus entered the Temple. It has been a journey, and now he has arrived. In fact this theme of journey has been developing in Luke's gospel during the previous ten chapters. Now begins his ministry in Jerusalem, which will lead to his death.*

*In his lament over the city (yesterday's reading) he said, Jerusalem if only today you knew the ways of peace! This was ironic when you consider that Jerusalem means city of peace. It is doubly ironic when you see that the first thing he does on entering the Temple is to cause a row! Luke spares us the details, but Mark says he upset the tables of the money changers and the chairs of those who were selling pigeons (11:15). It was a dramatic beginning! He had the fire of the ancient prophets in him quoting two of the greatest of them, Isaiah and Jeremiah.*

*That Temple was leveled by the Romans in the year 70 AD. So does it matter to us? Yes. The Temple, Eckhart said in a well-known passage, is now the human soul. So like Himself has God made the human soul that nothing else in heaven or on earth, of all the splendid creatures that God has so joyously created, resembles God so much as the human soul. For this reason God wants this temple cleared, that He may dwell there.*

**Saturday, November 20, 2004**  
**33rd Week in Ordinary Time**

**1st Reading: Rev 11:4-12**

**Gospel: Lk 20:27-40**

Some Sadducees arrived. These people claim that there is no resurrection and they asked Jesus this question, Master, in the Scripture Moses told us: If anyone dies leaving a wife but no children, his brother must take the wife, and the child to be born will be regarded as the child of the deceased man. Now, there were seven brothers; the first married a wife, but he died without children; and the second and the third took the wife; in fact all seven died leaving no children. Last of all the woman died. On the day of the resurrection, to which of them will the woman be wife? For the seven had her as wife.

And Jesus replied, Taking husband or wife is proper to people of this world, but for those who are considered worthy of the world to come and of resurrection from the dead, there is no more marriage. Besides, they cannot die for they are like the angels. They too are sons and daughters of God because they are born of the resurrection.

Yes, the dead will be raised, and even Moses implied it in the passage about the burning bush, where he calls the Lord *the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob*. For he is God of the living and not of the dead, and for him all are alive.

Some teachers of the Law then agreed with Jesus, Master, you have spoken well. They didn't dare to ask him anything else.

#### **Commentary**

*WE* already saw this scene on June 2, as recounted by Mark.

*There are two main approaches to the question of life beyond death: the philosophical and the religious.*

*In philosophical reflection the question is about the immortality of the soul. Immortal means undying: the suggestion is that the human soul is such that it cannot die. In practice it is very hard to make an argument of this kind without indulging in some form of human vanity. Every day we see all forms of life passing away; it is hard to see why we should be the sole exception. Death, said a biologist, is the greatest invention: it keeps life forever young! It is not in the least unthinkable.*

*The other approach is quite different. The Scriptures speak of the resurrection of the dead, not the immortality of the soul. In the world of the Scriptures the whole person falls into the power of death; and if there is any possibility of deliverance from this power, it is not established by arguments about the immortality of the soul but rather through belief that God will raise us up, as he raised Jesus. As the Liturgy says, In him our hope of resurrection dawned. Belief in the resurrection is a belief about God, not a belief about ourselves. Even in the case of Jesus, the Scriptures do not say that he rose from the dead, but that God raised him from death (see, for example, Acts 2:24).*

In this matter, then, we Christians are not invited to rake through the ashes for a spark of hope, but to look up at the slopes where the sun is rising!

### **Sunday, November 21, 2004 Christ the King**

#### **1st Reading: 2 S 5:1-3**

All the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said, We are your bone and flesh. In the past, when Saul was king over us, it was you who led Israel. And Yahweh said to you, You shall be the shepherd of my people Israel and you shall be commander over Israel. Before Yahweh, King David made an agreement with the elders of Israel who came to him at Hebron, and they anointed him king of Israel.

#### **2nd Reading: Col 1:12-20**

Constantly give thanks to the Father who has empowered us to receive our share in the inheritance of the saints in his kingdom of light. He rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son. In him we are redeemed and forgiven.

Christ is the beginning of everything

He is the image of the unseen God,  
and for all creation he is the firstborn,  
for in him all things were created,  
in heaven and on earth,  
visible and invisible:  
thrones, rulers, authorities, powers  
All was made through him and for him.

He is before all  
and all things hold together in him.  
And he is the head of the body, that is the Church,  
for he is the first, the first raised from the dead  
that he may be the first in everything,  
for God was pleased to let fullness dwell in him.  
Through him God willed to reconcile all things to himself,  
and through him, through his blood shed on the cross,  
God establishes peace,  
on earth as in heaven.

#### **Gospel: Lk 23:35-43**

The people stood by watching. As for the rulers, they jeered at him, saying to one another, Let the man who saved others now save himself, for he is the Messiah, the chosen one of God!

The soldiers also mocked him and when they drew near to offer him bitter wine, they said, So you are the king of the Jews? Free yourself! For above him was an inscription which read, This is the King of the Jews.

One of the criminals hanging with Jesus insulted him, So you are the Messiah? Save yourself and us as well! But the other rebuked him, saying, Have you no fear of God, you who received the same sentence as he did? For us it is just: this is payment for what we have done. But this man has done nothing wrong. And he said, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. Jesus replied, Truly, you will be with me today in paradise.

#### **Commentary**

*THE* gospels tell us that the kingdom of God is among you (Lk 17:21). They also say that it is still to come, May your kingdom come! (Mt 6:10).

The kingdom of God is already here in the sense that Jesus lives within and among us now. But we know also that his presence is obscured by the continued presence of evil in the world. Individuals and institutions are very far from being aligned on the will of God, and so the kingdom is incomplete. St. Paul imagines Christ eventually handing over a perfect kingdom to God his Father (1Cor 15:24), but since it is not yet perfect, his ultimate triumph is delayed. Origen (born in 185 A.D.) wrote the following, Until you hand over your life to the Father, Christ's life is not fully handed over. Without you he cannot receive his full glory. Without you: that is, without his people, who are his body and his limbs.

The phrase kingdom of heaven comes from Matthew's gospel; this may give the impression that it is a kingdom in another world. The other gospels say kingdom of God. Matthew was writing specifically for Jews, and Jews did not like to use the name God, out of respect. (In fact, to this day, some Jewish writers in English will put down G-d.) But this should not suggest to us that it is somewhere above the clouds. Christ wants to be king here, not king of the clouds.

### **Monday, November 22, 2004 34th Week in Ordinary Time**

**1st Reading: Rev 14:1-3, 4-5**

**Gospel: Lk 21:1-4**

Jesus looked up and saw rich people putting their gifts into the treasure box; he also saw a poor widow dropping in two small coins. And he said, Truly, I tell you, this poor widow put in more than all of them. For all gave an offering from their plenty, but she, out of her poverty, gave all she had to live on.

#### **Commentary**

*In* the verses just before this passage Jesus is lashing the religious authorities for swallowing the property of widows, while making a show of lengthy prayers. Just then, as if to illustrate what he said, along came a widow who put money in the collection box! It was very little two small coins but it was all she had to live on. Common sense would tell us that this passage is first and foremost a criticism of the Temple system and its wealth, but mostly it is given a pious interpretation, as if Jesus saw nothing but the widow's generosity. A widow in that society was entirely without resources or protection. Of course he saw her generosity, and it is not belittled in the least. But he also saw that she was an example of the system's capacity to exploit the poor.

Piety can be highly ambiguous. One of most pious men I ever met ruined the lives of several members of his family. One of the bitterest women I ever met is a daily Mass-goer. Instead of facing the evil that I do, I indulge in a life of piety to prove to myself and the world that I'm a good person. But first comes justice, then piety. As Dr. Johnson famously said, A scoundrel will beat you all in piety.

### **Tuesday, November 23, 2004 34th Week in Ordinary Time**

**1st Reading: Rev 14:14-19**

**Gospel: Lk 21:5-11**

While some people were talking about the Temple, remarking that it was adorned with fine stonework and rich gifts, Jesus said to them, The days will come when there shall not be left one stone upon another of all that you now admire; all will be torn down. And they asked him, Master, when will this be, and what will be the sign that this is about to take place?

Jesus then said, Take care not to be deceived, for many will come claiming my title and saying: I am he, the Messiah; the time is at hand. Do not follow them. When you hear of wars

and troubled times, don't be frightened; for all this must happen first, even though the end is not so soon.

And Jesus said, Nations will fight each other and kingdom will oppose kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, famines and plagues; in many places strange and terrifying signs from heaven will be seen.

**Commentary**

*THE destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem was not like the destruction of a church building. There are countless churches but there was only one Temple. To destroy that Temple was to destroy the identity of the Jewish people. So when Jesus said, The day is coming when there shall not be left one stone upon another of all that you now admire; all will be torn down, he was saying the unthinkable.*

*The end is always unthinkable for while you are still there to think about it, it's not yet the end. Death is unthinkable. I don't mean that it's terrible, but only that it's unthinkable. We can say we are thinking about it, but that's not the real thing. That's why we tend to see others as mortal, but not ourselves really.*

*Next Sunday is the beginning of a new Liturgical year, so this is the final week of the old year: that's why we have such strange readings every day. The year is coming to an end. Anything coming to an end reminds us of our mortality. This is a week for meditating on the impermanence of all things. Because we do it with the Liturgy it's not a dreary or terrible subject; it's about life and death together the inseparable mystery.*

**Wednesday, November 24, 2004  
34th Week in Ordinary Time**

**1st Reading: Rev 15:1-4**

**Gospel: Lk 21:12-19**

Jesus said to his disciples, People will lay their hands on you and persecute you; you will be delivered to the Jewish courts and put in prison, and for my sake you will be brought before kings and governors. This will be your opportunity to bear witness.

So keep this in mind: do not worry in advance about what to answer, for I will give you words and wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict.

You will be betrayed even by parents, and brothers, by relatives and friends, and some of you will be put to death. But even though you are hated by all for my name's sake, not a hair of your head will perish. Through perseverance you will possess your own selves.

**Commentary**

*DEATH, when it comes, is bound to be a new experience! We only die once, and no one can do it for us. Don't worry in advance about what to answer, Jesus said. When a world is ending or when your own world is ending, how could you know in advance what to say? Death is unthinkable. What is thought-over is second-hand. Death will be new.*

*Let's see what the wise Francis Bacon (1561-1626) has to say about death. Men fear death, as children fear to go in the dark; and as that natural fear in children is increased with tales, so is the other. Then he quotes a Latin author to the effect that the trappings of death are more frightening than death itself. Groans, and convulsions, and a discolored face, and friends with weeping, and blacks, and obsequies, and the like, show death terrible. But death itself is natural. The sweetest canticle, he said, is the Nunc dimittis: the prayer of ancient Simeon when he held the infant Jesus in his arms.*

At last, all-powerful Master,	Which you have prepared for all nations,
You give leave to your servant	The light to enlighten the Gentiles
To go in peace, according to	And give glory to Israel, your people.
your promise.	
For my eyes have seen your salvation	

*(Lk 2:29-32)*

*This canticle is part of the Church's Night Prayer. It is full of peace and confidence; there's not a black thought in it.*

**Thursday, November 25, 2004  
34th Week in Ordinary Time**

**1st Reading: Rev 18:1-2, 21-23; 19:1-3, 9**

**Gospel: Lk 21:20-28**

Jesus said to his disciples, When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then you must know that the time has come when it will be reduced to a wasteland. Then, if you are in Judea, flee to the mountains; if you are in the city, leave it; and let those who are in the fields not return to the city.

For these will be the days of its punishment and all that was announced in the Scripture will be fulfilled. How hard will it be for pregnant women and for mothers with babies at the breast! For a great calamity will come upon the land, and divine justice upon this people. They will be put to death by the sword or taken as slaves to other nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled upon by the pagans until the time of the pagans is fulfilled.

Then there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth anguish of perplexed nations when they hear the roaring of the sea and its waves. People will faint with fear at the mere thought of what is to come upon the world, for the forces of the universe will be shaken. And at this time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

The signs of the times Now, when you see the first events, stand erect and lift up your heads, for your deliverance is drawing near.

**Commentary**

*HERE* is a poem by W.B. Yeats, *The Second Coming*, written in 1919. Yeats was filled with foreboding by the Russian Revolution, believing it to be the end of civilization. *The Second Coming* would not be the return of Christ, but the birth of the totally sinister. Perhaps we have to feel the evil of the world before we have a right to proclaim Christian hope.

*Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.  
Surely some revelation is at hand;  
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.  
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out*

*When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi  
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert  
A shape with lion body and head of a man,  
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,  
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it  
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds,  
The darkness drops again; but now I know  
That twenty centuries of stony sleep  
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,  
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last  
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?*

**Friday, November 26, 2004  
34th Week in Ordinary Time**

**1st Reading: Rev 20:1-4, 11 21:2**

**Gospel: Lk 21:29-33**

Jesus said to his disciples, Look at the fig tree and all the trees. As soon as their buds sprout, you know that summer is already near. In the same way, as soon as you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly, I tell you, this generation will not pass away, until all this has happened: heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

**Commentary**

*THE Kingdom of heaven is near. Eckhart comments, When I think about God's kingdom, I am often dumbfounded at its greatness: for God's kingdom is God Himself in all His richness. It is no small thing, God's kingdom. If one were to consider all possible worlds God might make, that constitutes God's kingdom. Sometimes I declare that in whatever soul God's kingdom dawns, which knows God's kingdom to be near her, is in no need of sermons or teaching: she is instructed by it and assured of eternal life for she knows and is aware how near God's kingdom is, and she can say with Jacob, God is in this place, and I knew it not but now I know it. A person may go out into the fields and say his prayers and know God, or he may go to church and know God: but if he is more aware of God because he is in a quiet place, as is usual, this comes from his imperfection and not from God: for God is equally in all things and all places, and is equally ready to give Himself as far as in Him lies and he knows God rightly who knows God equally (in all things).*

**Saturday, November 27, 2004  
34th Week in Ordinary Time**

**1st Reading: Rev 22:1-7**

**Gospel: Lk 21:34-36**

Jesus said to his disciples, Be on your guard; let not your hearts be weighed down with a life of pleasure, drunkenness and worldly cares, lest that day catch you suddenly as a trap. For it will come upon all the inhabitants of the whole earth. But watch at all times and pray, that you may be able to escape all that is bound to happen and to stand before the Son of Man.

**Commentary**

*THERE S a good book called The Past is a Foreign Country. Looking at it another way, however, you could say that the past is not so foreign since we spend a lot of our time there! And the future is another favorite holiday spot! David Lowenthal lists some of the things that have now become nostalgia objects: cars with starting handles, 1950s juke-boxes, Bill Haley, Button B... But no matter how stuffed the past is, the future can be even more stuffed. The past is somewhat limited by reality, but the future is limited only by imagination. Everything we can't face, everything we want to postpone, we send there. Everything we want to change the easy way, we send there. Everything we want to have without doing anything to have it, we send there. Everything we want to be, without really trying, we send there. The past can keep Button B, because the future has every Button in the alphabet! It s a comfortable place, full of easy promise .*

*Unless, that is, it isn't! Today s reading puts it in a different light. It can catch you suddenly like a trap. Watch! Jesus said. That doesn't mean, Be a spectator. It means Be awake! What he called that day will not come as a future day but as Today.*

**Sunday, November 28, 2004  
1st Sunday of Advent**

**1st Reading: Is 2:1-5**

The vision of Isaiah, son of Amoz, concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

In the last days, the mountain of Yahweh's house shall be set over the highest mountains and shall tower over the hills.

All the nations shall stream to it, saying, Come, let us go to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and we may walk in his paths. For the Teaching comes from Zion, and from Jerusalem the word of Yahweh.

He will rule over the nations and settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not raise sword against nation; they will train for war no more. O nation of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!

**2nd Reading: Rom 13:11-14**

You know what hour it is. This is the time to awake, for our salvation is now nearer than when we first believed; the night is almost over and day is at hand. Let us discard, therefore, everything that belongs to darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. As we live in the full light of day, let us behave with decency; no banquets with drunkenness, no promiscuity or licentiousness, no fighting or jealousy. Put on, rather, the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not be led by the will of the flesh nor follow its desires.

**Gospel: Mt 24:37-44**

Jesus said to his disciples, At the coming of the Son of Man it will be just as it was in the time of Noah. In those days before the Flood, people were eating and drinking, and marrying, until the day when Noah went into the ark. Yet they did not know what would happen until the flood came and swept them away. So will it be at the coming of the Son of Man. Of two men in the field, one will be taken and the other left. Of two women grinding wheat together at the mill, one will be taken and the other left.

Stay awake, then, for you do not know on what day your Lord will come. Just think about this: if the owner of the house knew that the thief would come by night around a certain hour, he would stay awake to prevent his house to be broken into. So be alert, for the Son of Man will come at the hour you least expect.

**Commentary**

*WELCOME to a new Liturgical year!*

*Why, he said, does the Church spend the whole of Advent praying, Come, Lord Jesus! when it knows perfectly well that he s here already in the Blessed Sacrament? Why all this make-believe? Then he sat back massively in his chair, satisfied, and exhaled sharply through his nose.*

*But you ve come to this Advent retreat! I said to him in my mind. Why didn't you stay at home and just make visits to the Blessed Sacrament? Out loud I said, That s a good question!*

*The Lord is here and not here: how can we make sense of that, without going into make-believe? Think of it this way. Imagine someone whose only musical interest was rock. He is in a room with others where they are playing, let s say, the Ode to Joy from Beethoven s Pastoral*

*symphony. The music fills the room, it fills the ears of every person there; it holds nothing back, it gives itself completely. It evokes a deep emotion in everyone there except the lone rocker. He has perfect hearing in the physical sense, but he is deaf to this music. The music is present to him and not present. In some such way, the Lord is present to us and not present.*

*It would probably be better to say: the Lord is present to us but we are not present to him. When I pray, Come, Lord Jesus! I am asking (in the words of St. Augustine) that he break through my barrier of deafness.*

**Monday, November 29, 2004**  
**1<sup>st</sup> Week of Advent**

**1st Reading: Is 4:2-6**

**Gospel: Mt 8:5-11**

When Jesus entered Capernaum, an army captain approached him to ask his help, Sir, my servant lies sick at home. He is paralyzed and suffers terribly. Jesus said to him, I will come and heal him.

The captain answered, I am not worthy to have you under my roof. Just give an order and my boy will be healed. For I myself, a junior officer, give orders to my soldiers. And if I say to one: Go, he goes, and if I say to another: Come, he comes, and to my servant: Do this, he does it.

When Jesus heard this he was astonished and said to those who were following him, I tell you, I have not found such faith in Israel. I say to you, many will come from east and west and sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob at the feast in the kingdom of heaven.

**Commentary**

*St. Augustine commented on this, By declaring himself unworthy, the centurion showed himself worthy worthy to receive the Lord not indeed into his house but into his heart. Nor could he have said this with so much faith and humility, had he not already welcomed in his heart Him whom he feared to have in his house. And indeed it would have been no great privilege that Jesus should enter his house, if He had not already entered into his heart.*

*St. Augustine had a keener eye than anyone for paradox. Even if he had never written another word he would be remembered for saying that we could not seek God unless we had already found God: for how would you know it was God we found unless we already knew God? Augustine himself had been lost for many years, and he understood the mind and heart of the seeker. Then he came to understand the deepest thing about searching for God: that in our very searching, God is searching for us. This insight has been a guiding light for searchers down the ages: the Hound of Heaven is on the chase. This is the theme of Advent. We wait for God, knowing that God is waiting for us. We long for God, knowing that God is longing for us. We say, Come, Lord Jesus, and he says, Come!*

**Tuesday, November 30, 2004**  
**1<sup>st</sup> Week of Advent**

**1st Reading: Rom 10:9-18**

**Gospel: Mt 4:18-22**

As Jesus walked by the lake of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. He said to them, Come, follow me, and I will make you fish for people. At once they left their nets and followed him.

He went on from there and saw two other brothers, James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John in a boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets. Jesus called them. At once they left the boat and their father and followed him.

**Commentary**

*In the first three gospels Andrew is not mentioned except in lists of the Twelve. But in John's gospel he appears three times, and in each case he is introducing other people to Jesus! First of all, his brother, Simon Peter. Then in Jn 6:8 he is bringing forward a boy with five loaves and two fish. And in Jn 12:20-22 he is bringing some Greeks to Jesus. Meanwhile he himself managed to remain almost invisible. In John's gospel, Jesus first called Andrew, and Andrew introduced his brother Simon (Peter) to Jesus (1:40). Yet it was Peter, not Andrew, who came to belong to the inner circle, Peter, James and John. He is regularly described as the brother of Simon Peter (Mt 10:2; Lk 6:14). Yet nowhere does he show any resentment about this. It is rare enough to find people who are willing to take the second place, to play second fiddle. How good it would be if the only thing that people could remember about you is that you brought people to Jesus!*

