

THE EMMAUS SERIES

33rd Sunday Year C

Malachi 3:19-20

2 Thessalonians 3:7-12

Luke 21:5-19

The sun of righteousness will shine out

The Church's year is drawing to a close. During the coming weeks, the liturgies invite us to look forward in hope to the glorious fulfilment of God's plan for creation.

At the time of Jesus' ministry, the Jewish nation was full of restless expectations – giving rise at times to uprisings seeking to throw off the yoke of Roman occupation. The Jerusalem Temple not only symbolised the nation's life and hopes; it was one of the wonders of the ancient world, filling God's people with joy and pride each time they saw it. The disciples of Jesus would have been shocked, therefore, when Jesus interrupted their buzz of admiration to foretell the Temple's destruction. This prediction was well known - at the trial of Jesus, outrage was expressed that he had spoken of the destruction of the Temple. Today's scholarship sees his dramatic disrupting of the life of the Temple, at this same time, as an act pointing to the end of the era symbolised by the old Temple.

The restless expectations of Israel - that were the explosive background to Jesus teaching – recalled the words of the great prophets, and anticipated a turning point in history, confronting the nations of the world with Israel's special place in the designs of God. It is important to appreciate these expectations as we interpret the message of Jesus. The Jewish people did not look forward to the end of history, but to an intervention of God that would inaugurate a new era of human history. In this new era, all the institutions of Israel, such as the Temple worship, would be even more glorious. Jesus certainly brings the message that the hopes of Israel are to be realised; but it will be a realisation that shows such things as the Temple as only a pale foreshadowing of God's final blessings – 'the hour is coming when you will worship the Father, neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem' (Jn 4:21). The dismayed reaction of the disciples reminds us how attached old Israel was to their venerable institutions; and the history of the early Church shows how difficult it was for them to accept that the new order of things brought by the Saviour was the fulfilment of their hopes. In what Jesus has to say after the prediction of the destruction of the Temple, he anticipates the turmoil that will follow, as people struggle to understand the designs of God. About to experience a violent rejection by his own people, he prepares his disciples for the persecutions they will experience as they bring his message to the world.

The first Christians tended to link the new era inaugurated by the death and resurrection of Jesus with the end of the world. Some Thessalonians (second reading) had even given themselves to a 'life of idleness', as they await the end! Luke, however, warns against such an outlook; he does not interpret the prediction of Jesus and what follows as referring to the end of the world. In a separate passage (Lk 17: 20-37) he has given the teaching of Jesus concerning the end of human history. Clearly, in today's passage, he warns against interpreting the disasters of human history as signs of the coming the end.

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