

Homily

The Sunday next before Advent

Written by Ed Pacht, Rochester NH

Presented by John Watson, Lay Reader

Intended for use by Layreaders in the absence of a priest.

On this, the last Sunday for the Church year, we are called to think about the Last Things, a theme that continues as we begin a new year with the season of Advent.

"I beheld the earth

And, lo, it was without form, and void:

And the heavens, and they had no light."

These are the startling words of God as quoted by Jeremiah. We are talking about the coming judgement and the end of this age

What does God see?

He sees what He saw at the very beginning.

Genesis 1:1

"In the beginning God created the heaven and earth

And the earth was without form and void

And the darkness was upon the face of the deep."

Without form and void. Two-who-vah-bow-who

A rather mysterious Hebrew phrase that appears only twice in the bible.

It signifies both emptiness and disorganization.

The first time it is used it is speaking of a time when nothing had yet been made.

When (outside of God Himself) existence was emptiness and there was no order.

The second time the same words are used but this time God is speaking of a time when a world is in existence, having been in existence for many centuries, and is now to be judged.

In this judgement what is it that God sees?

Everything that he created is in place. The physical universe still exists with all the splendor He created it to have.

Man, the creature made in His image, still walks upon the earth and still produces works of breathtaking beauty, and still shows forth in many ways the beauty of that divine image.

But what is this? In the midst of a world intended to be perfect there is an ever going presence of evil, of ugliness, and of disorder.

War, hatred, prejudice, pollution, disordered and disrespectful personal lives, utter disregard for the plans of God Himself. All of this can be seen everywhere.

The beauty of His creation is once again without form and is void.

From Jeremiah 27

“For thus hath the Lord said, the whole land shall be desolate: yet will I not make a full end. For this shall the earth mourn, and the heavens above be black; because I have spoken it, I have purposed it, and will not repent, neither will I turn back from it.”

We do not know, cannot know, God’s timetable for judgement, but we do know that judgement is sure, that this age and this world have a certain end, but also that this is not a full end.

The redeemed shall enter into the holy place with joy and singing, in an eternity where God’s beauty is at last revealed in all its fullness.

Jesus is just as startling when he speaks about the coming judgement. When we speak of sin, and of God's loathing for sin, we tend to think about sins of commission, the things we do against His command.

Theft, murder, adultery, coveting, all of Gods laws.

But, though he never approved of any of those things, Jesus did not spend a whole lot of time condemning it.

He knew such things were done, and were wrong but he called for repentance and offered forgiveness. We should all be thankful that His forgiveness is offered over and over again. For this is what we all need....all of us.

Jesus's fearsome words of judgement, as quoted by St. Matthew, don't concern sins of commission but rather, sins of omission.

They refer to what we should have done and didn't.

As he said to those being condemned:

"I was hungered, and ye gave me no meat. I was thirsty and ye gave me no drink. I was a stranger, and ye took me not in. Naked, and ye clothed me not. Sick and in prison, and ye visited me not."

Ultimately they had failed to see God in the needs of those around them. They had failed to seek God's will as to what their neighbors needed from them. They had, perhaps, worshipped God in formal worship services but they had not worshipped Him in their daily life.

Let me say that again. If there is one "take away" from today's Homily it is this.

Ultimately they had failed to see God in the needs of those around them. They had failed to seek God's will as to what their neighbors needed from them. They had, perhaps, worshipped God in formal worship services but they had not worshipped Him in their daily life.

They had had lived as though the world was indeed without form and void, and that is what the Judge saw in them.

“And these,” he said, “shall go away into everlasting punishment.”

Into that formless and empty void we call Hell.

“.....but the righteous shall go into life eternal.”

The righteous, not those without sin, for there are no such people. They are in fact those who have seen God and looked for Him, who have sought to live by his direction, and who have come to him when they have failed and seek His forgiveness.

May we all see God, minister to Him, and be among the redeemed.

Let us pray.

Almighty God, who hast created man in thine own image; grant us grace fearlessly to contend against evil; and to make no peace with oppression; and that we may reverently use our freedom. Help us to employ it in the maintenance of justice among all men and nations. To the glory of thy holy name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.