

In the year 66 AD, the Jewish people revolted and overthrew their Roman overlords. They declared independence. It took a while for the Romans to gather their army and transport it to Israel. It took a while longer for them to squash resistance in the north, and then move south to lay siege to Jerusalem. But in the year 70, Jerusalem fell, and the Romans destroyed the Jewish temple.

If you go to Israel today, you can see the rubble. If you stand at the southwest corner of the temple mount, you can see giant stones, some the size and shape of our altar. Hundreds of stones, piled haphazardly. They had been part of the Temple wall. And the Romans knocked the walls down, and the stones plummeted to the valley below. And there they sit today.

In our Gospel lesson today, we hear Jesus speaking about this event. It was still 40 years in Jesus' future. But his words proved prophetic. Jesus said,
"The days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down."¹

If you stand in Jerusalem looking at the pile of rubble that was once the Temple walls, Jesus' words are chilling: "Not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down."

Jesus is basically saying, 'If you're counting on this Temple being there forever, you're making the wrong bet. Don't put your trust in the temple; it's going to be destroyed.'

The picture painted in our Gospel lesson is not very comforting. Jesus begins by talking of the destruction of the temple. For those who are placing their trust in the status quo, and in their own institutions, Jesus is issuing a wake-up call. In a few decades, your temple and your institutions will be destroyed. Don't place your trust in them. Trust in God alone.

And then Jesus speaks of something else coming down the pipe: hardship, suffering, persecution. If you think your life of discipleship is going to be a cakewalk, think again. Jesus tells the disciples what they can expect: persecution, arrest, betrayal, some of you will be put to death, and you will be hated by all because of my name.

That's pretty heavy duty stuff. Suffering and persecution. Being put to death for believing in Jesus. That's hard for us to wrap our American minds around sometimes, because we are incredibly blessed with religious freedom.

Yet we know that there are Christians today in other parts of the world who still have to endure that same kind of suffering and persecution. Many Christians are still being killed for their faith. A few of them make the headlines from time to time.

There will be persecution, Jesus says. This is as true in the 21st century as it was in the first. But there is also a promise. "Not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your souls."

¹ Lk 21:6

Jesus never promises that things will be easy. But Jesus does promise to be with us. And he promises that if we persevere, he will take care of us in the end, and God will set things right. Though suffering and pain and persecution are current realities, they will not exist forever. God promises to take care of us. God will have his way, and things will be made right.

We have that wonderful promise in today's OT lesson from Malachi. This lesson is from the last part of the last book of the OT. In Malachi, God is answering the accusations of humans. It's a repeating pattern in Malachi: God states the peoples' accusations against him, then offers a rebuttal. In the verses leading up to our lesson today, Malachi writes, "Thus says the Lord: You have spoken harsh words against me." God says in essence, 'You people keep complaining. You keep saying that it doesn't do any good to serve God. You keep saying that I'm not doing my job, that the good suffer, and the evil prosper.'

It's easy to understand that accusation against God. I make it myself sometimes. Why Lord? Why do good people suffer while the evil seem prosper? Why do honest people have to struggle to make ends meet while the dishonest seem to be raking the money in right and left? It's not fair Lord. Why do Christians in other parts of the world have to suffer and die simply because they're Christians?

But God says, 'Hang on a minute. I'm going to take care of things.' 'Those who revere me, those who worship and trust me shall be my special possession.' "Special possession" is a poetic image. It literally is the treasure a king would keep in his treasury. God is saying that those who trust in me are my treasure that I will keep with me forever.

And then Malachi speaks of God setting things right in the end. The day of the Lord is coming like a fire, burning like an oven. Those who do evil will be dealt with. But for you who revere my name, God says the fire will be like the sun, "the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings."²

It's a wonderful poetic image. The sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings.

That line finds its way into a famous Christmas Carol. In 6 weeks we'll be singing, "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing." Charles Wesley writes in that hymn that Christ is "Risen with healing in his wings/light and life to all he brings/hail the Sun of Righteousness/hail the heaven born Prince of Peace."

Malachi paints a wonderful, comforting image of God's coming, rising like the sun. And for those who love God, that rising sun will bring light and life and healing.

We live in a time where it seems like many of the things we trust in are up for grabs. We live in a time of great cultural change and flux. The institutions we've come to rely upon seem less trustworthy or less stable.

² Mal 4:2

So we need to remember that Jesus cautioned the Jewish people about placing too much trust in their Temple. Instead they needed to trust in the God who was worshipped in that Temple.

We also need to be careful. We've just come through a very bizarre and contentious election cycle. And, yes, we need to pray for our new president-elect as well as our other elected leaders. And, yes, we need to pray for our fellow citizens—we are still very divided as a people. We have some who are excited about the election results, some who are neutral, and some who are very nervous about what the future may hold. So we need to hold our country and all of our fellow citizens in prayer.

We say in our Pledge of Allegiance that we aspire to be one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

As Christians we are called to hold ourselves and our leaders to that high standard: seeking unity as one nation, one people, AND seeking liberty and justice for all.

After all, in our baptismal covenant we have vowed before God that we will "strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being."³ Thus we need to be ever vigilant to make sure the rights of all of all fellow citizens are respected and protected. And our participation in our electoral and governmental processes is an important way of doing this.

But, it's vitally important as Christians to always remember that ultimate salvation doesn't come from any political party or any political system. Christians do not owe their ultimate allegiance to the donkey or the elephant. Christians owe their ultimate allegiance to the Lamb, to Jesus, the Lamb of God. Jesus alone is the ultimate authority. And he calls us to place our trust in the living God. God is the only one in whom we can place 100% of our trust.

Trust in God and persevere. Pray that God's will WILL be done on earth as it is in heaven. Then work to do your part. Strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being.

And work to do your part, believing in the assurance that God will set things right. The Sun of Righteousness will rise, with healing in his wings.

Our call is not to worry, but to persevere. Our call is to trust in the living God. Our temples may be destroyed. Our institutions may change or they may even disappear. At times, evil may seem to prosper in our world. But in the end, the Sun of Righteousness will rise, and things will be made right.

There's a wonderful old poem written by the Spanish nun St. Teresa of Avila. Though it's hundreds of years old, it's still fresh today. The poem is "Nada te turbe." In Spanish it flows poetically,⁴ while in English it's a little more awkward. But even in translation it's spiritually wonderful. St. Teresa writes,

³ BCP p 305

⁴ *Nada te turbe,*

*Let nothing disturb you
Let nothing dismay you
All things pass away
But God never changes
Patience receives
All that it strives for
The one who has God lacks nothing
God alone suffices*

That's what we need to hold on to. Nada te turbe. Let nothing disturb you.

God never changes.
The one who has God lacks nothing.
God alone suffices. God alone suffices.

*nada te espante
todo se pasa,
Dios no se muda,
la paciencia
todo lo alcanza,
quien a Dios tiene nada le falta
sólo Dios basta.*