

33<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, 14 November 2021

Homily: Fr. Ken

Nearly every day, scientists tell us something new about our universe. Our knowledge is constantly increasing. But the more we discover about the vastness of the universe, the more we become familiar with it.

Also, the more that space travel becomes commonplace, especially recently, the more we also take it for granted. We seldom hear anymore when a manned rocket is launched to the international space station.

None of this applied in the world described in the scripture texts. In the ancient world, people shared a very limited and very different view of what existed around them. There was no concept of universe: only Earth, and what was above and below it. The Earth was presumed to be flat. Why not? It looks flat. Even today there are some people who believe that the Earth is flat and they deny the Copernican Revolution, (and they are not even members of Congress). But back then, the sky above was thought to be made of water. The sea is blue and so is the sky; therefore, the sky must also be made of water, and the sun, moon, and stars must float across it. There is an obvious problem here: how can the sky remain up where it is, if it is made of water? There is an answer to that: it was held up by a strong but transparent "vault", thought by some to have been made of a very strong and thinly beaten metal. One more point is important to note: for the people of ancient times, the sun, moon, and stars were heavenly powers, not astronomical objects as we know today. They were thought to be possible sources of evil, or beings who were opposed to the ways of Israel's God. Those beliefs were commonly held up to and including the time of Jesus.

So, when we think about the Gospel, we can understand people's shock at hearing Jesus speak about the total collapse of the sky which people believed was in control of their world.

The context of Jesus' word is especially important. This weekend's Gospel is part of a long list of comments Jesus made after leaving the Jerusalem Temple with his disciples. His passion and death are nearing. One of Jesus' disciples was struck by the magnificence of this extraordinary edifice. The Temple was central to Judaism. It had been greatly extended and improved by King Herod the Great, at the cost of massive taxation of his subjects. This disciple says, "What wonderful stones, what wonderful buildings!" Imagine his shock when Jesus says that not one stone of this will stand upon another—a prophecy fulfilled in 70 A.D., when the Romans destroyed it.

Jesus now makes predictions that warn his disciples against placing their hopes on things they can see: these will all disappear too. Finally, he turns to the "heavenly bodies". Even they will fall; the sun and moon will lose their brightness; stars will fall from the heavens and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

Gospel stories like this one may seem distant to us today, rooted as they are in terminology and images foreign to our contemporary understanding of the universe in which we live.

The point of this story, however, is as relevant to us today as it was to Jesus' initial group of disciples. At all times, disciples are to be wary of giving allegiance to what may seem impressive now, but will not last. The list of these include: people, ideologies, wealth, technology, and so on. The list is almost endless.

Jesus reminds us that all of these are transitory. We are called to have our hearts set on the Kingdom of God, that is, the heaven of eternal life. He reminds us, his words to us will never pass away.

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