

Homily – Proper 28 – A – Zephaniah 1

Text – Zephaniah 1:7a – **Be silent before the Lord GOD! For the day of the LORD is near.**

We are fast approaching the end of another church year. As we are in these final Sundays, it is customary for the Scripture reading to focus on one of the most spectacular and yet most misunderstood time. We focus on the times described by St. Paul in our epistle reading for last Sunday when **the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God.** For the next three Sundays, we focus on the end times.

When we mention the day of the return of our Lord, there are a few things which flash into our minds which make this crucial teaching a caricature or reality. Our minds envision the grizzled man, standing with a clap – board sign, trying with all his might to persuade those that walk near him of the great cataclysmic events that surrounds the coming of the Lord; the **wars and rumors of wars, nation rising against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, famines and earthquakes in various places.** The sadness is that the more that they call, the more people ignore them. And along with these men, we have the doomsday prophets who state that the world will end on a specific day and time. Even though **no one knows that day or that hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the**

Son, but only the Father, still they declare that they are privy to this heavenly wisdom and many people believe them, going as far as to sell all they have in preparation for the day.

When the world hears these warnings and predictions, they tend to close their ears and their minds. Sadly, this silence is carried on even into the body of Christ. When the Church issues the call for all the faithful to **keep awake, be sober** and be prepared for the coming of the Lord, it is a message that receives an indifferent look. Many find themselves doubting something that is going to happen on such a grand and universal scale.

The prophet Zephaniah would have been met with the same resistance. But, the prophet was not pointing to the second coming of Christ for the obvious reason that Jesus hasn't come a first time as of yet. But the blessed prophet had been sent to Israel to declare something that was on a very large scale. He was charged with pointing everyone in Israel that **the day of the LORD was near**; that their nation would be overrun by outside nations who would destroy their cities and carry their citizens into slavery. This is a vital warning that much like the end times went largely ignored and even threatened the prophet's life.

The reason why Israel refused to listen was that they had a good thing going. They thought they stood in fellowship with the Lord because they were biologically descended from the covenant people. When it came to their many

sacrifices, they thought that they were pleasing to God. They also looked back in their history and marked how God had never allowed any foreign power to conquer them. They had some rough scrapes but they never experienced the horror of being a conquered nation. Finally, there was the way life was at the present moment. Their nation was enjoying prosperity and peace which, to them, was evidence that God was with them. They soon became **complacent, saying in their hearts, “The LORD will not do good, nor will He do ill.”** They felt that life was too good to be worried about what some prophet had to say.

Their complacency is not their only problem. God promises that He **will punish the officials and the king’s sons and all who array themselves in foreign attire**. No, the judgment and salvation of God are not based upon a fashion sense. Instead, God is speaking to Israel’s love and affinity for the things that are a part of the heathen cultures that surround them. They are preferring their ways to the ways of God.

The nation was also guilty of **violence and fraud**. If you read the texts from all the other prophets that proclaimed God’s Word to Israel at this time, you found that the nation was guilty of greed, violence and covetousness. The rich were getting richer off taking from the poor by one way or another. God’s desire is that they help their neighbor. They were helping themselves.

Though these are all a smack in God's face, we find that there is another grievous sin for which Israel stands guilty. Through the prophet, God promises that He will **punish everyone who leaps over the threshold**. This is not just a goofy way of entering a home. Rather, from 1 Samuel 5:5 we are told about how **the priests of Dagon and all who enter the house of Dagon**, a Philistine god, **did not tread on the threshold of Dagon's** temple. What could be more offensive to God than for Israel to allow a false god to be worshipped in their land or for any Israelite to pay homage to some false deity?

God is a God of mercy and grace but He is not a foolish God. Israel had acted as a child in need of discipline and now God would exercise this discipline in order to turn them away from their foolish behavior and back into His forgiving light. This time of discipline was **near and hastening fast; a day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet blast and battle cry**. In this day, Israel as a nation was destroyed, never to be rebuilt. They were **the sacrifice that God had prepared**.

But, God's grace still stood. In His mercy, He would **consecrate His guests**. He would call a remnant of Judah to return and from the remnant would come the child of promise, the Messiah promised so long ago. His name would be **Jesus and He would save His people from their sins**.

The destruction brought upon Israel was devastating but it pales upon the great **day of the LORD which is near, near and hastening fast**. The call of the prophets for Israel to repent and return to the Lord serves as a lesson to be learned by us so many centuries later. The destruction of a nation is almost unbelievable but what is to come makes the fall of a nation inconsequential. On this day, the world will be judged and consequences will be dire and forever. Are you ready?

When we look back, it's easy to look at ancient Israel and say, "O those foolish people!" Are we and the world around us much better? Complacency is still the norm of the day. People continue to say, "**The LORD will not do good, nor will He do ill**." They are not worried about anything especially warnings against sin and the return of Christ. Things are too good. Why worry?

A challenge for all the faithful is to remember that **we are not** to be **of the world, just as Jesus was not of the world**. But, the seduction continues. Even the church is tempted to be more earthly – friendly, changing and compromising doctrine to suit the desires of man, not God. It is not long before people begin "**leaping the threshold**", redefining Jesus into the God they want Him to be and not being so concerned with that messy cross and resurrection stuff.

Here we stand, with the day of the Lord drawing near. Because it is so near and God's promise of judgment on that, we must continue to warn and remind all people that this is a very real day. We must warn all people that this is not a joke. It

is as real as it was for Israel. It will be **a day of wrath**, as sin is judged. It will be **a day of distress and anguish**, as they realize that there is no second chances. It is a day of ruin and devastation, as the old world is destroyed. It is a day of darkness and gloom, as those who are judged for their lack of repentance and faith **will be cast...into the outer darkness...**where **there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.**

For the faithful, for those who turn from this sinful world towards the light of Christ, we live each day **fully aware**, knowing **that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night**. In these last days, we **are sober, having put on the breastplate of faith**, faith founded on the life, death and resurrection of Christ. We put on **love**, seeking to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul and mind and our neighbor as ourselves. Finally, we put on **the helmet the hope of salvation**, our confidence for the future sealed in the blood of Christ.

Though the moment to come is far more ominous than the destruction of Israel, we are not afraid. Not because we have earned it but by grace for we realize that **God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that...we might live with him**. And so we declare the warning, not to scare or deceive anyone but to **encourage** all people to **build one another up**. The day of the LORD is near. Amen, come Lord Jesus.

AMEN