



GOSPEL GOSSIP

'All will be thrown down.'

St Luke 21. 5-19

Sunday 16 November

The season of Advent which begins on 30 November, is a time of preparation, preparation for the coming of God's kingdom. In these last few Sundays before Advent begins, we are given a taste of what is to come, not only just in terms of theme, but also in terms of what God has in store for us. The readings set for this Sun remind us that nothing physical is everlasting – 'all will be thrown down.'

Jesus makes this point through talking about the Temple. This is the place which was built to house God's presence. This is the place which is the centre of the Jewish faith. This is the place which far outshines in magnificence and size any human dwelling. This is a place in which countless Jews over the centuries have invested physically and spiritually. This is a place which has been destroyed twice before. This is a place which would be finally and completely destroyed for ever by the Romans less than fifty years after Jesus' death. Jesus knew the significance of this place; he also knew its impermanence – 'all will be thrown down' – not fall down, but thrown down.

- How would you react to the news that that which
- you hold most dear would cease to be?
- Would you accept any responsibility for its destruction?
- What would be your response – rebuild or forget and why?
- Do you believe that God's kingdom will come and all human institutions and life end?
- Is this something to be looked forwards to?

This year saw the completion of the repairs to Notre Dame in Paris after the fire. In its way it is as iconic as the Temple, to believers and non-believers alike. The sense of shock and disbelief was almost palpable. Committed to its rebuilding, it is now once again a glorious building, attracting visitors and pilgrims alike.

The same could be said of the Temple in Jerusalem. In 72 AD it was utterly destroyed, but unlike Notre Dame, it has not been rebuilt, and never will be. What Jesus is talking about in today's gospel is not buildings or possessions, but human existence itself. Christians believe that Christ will come in glory to judge both the living and the dead. The life that follows this mortal life is the same in purpose (to live for the glory of God) but rather than being for a finite period of time, but will be eternal. We need to prepare ourselves for this event. However, Jesus warns us quite directly that there will be 'false alarms' both in terms of natural events and human teaching, yet we must not be alarmed nor depart from the truth. He concludes what can be seen as a frightening scenario with words of comfort and reassurance: Not a hair on your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your souls.'

- Hearing this, do you wonder what is the point?
- What do you think future life is like?
- For how long do you think you'll be able to withstand the temptations around us?
- How confident are you about interpreting the 'signs'?
- Do you really want to be 'saved'?

The end of the world is what is called in theology, 'eschatology'. Whether we like it or not we will all come to an end, collectively and individually. Jesus forcefully reminds us of this fact, not to frighten or threaten us, but to enable us to have confidence to face the end and to prepare for it, as 'all will be thrown down.'