



THIRTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

CYCLE C

Malachi 3:19-20
2 Thessalonians 3:7-12
Luke 21:5-19

GATHERING

(An unlit candle rests on a table in the gathering place. A large crucifix rests on one side of the candle; a small pillow rests on the other.)

The end of the liturgical year is fast upon us. Let us remember that every end is a new beginning; that our labors are always God-noticed and that nothing can happen that can separate us from the love or grace of almighty God. Last week we reflected on fidelity to God in the midst of violence and turmoil. How did you act as a peacemaker this past week? *(Members share briefly.)*

OPENING PRAYER

(The candle is lit. The leader calls the community to some time of quiet in the presence of God. After a minute or so, the leader invites members to be in touch with a worry, a failing, a doubt or fear that troubles them presently. A selection of instrumental music is played, after which the leader invites members, as they wish, to share in just one sentence what is on their minds. To each person's concern, members respond, "Brother/Sister, God is always with you." When all have had the opportunity to share, the community prays the Lord's Prayer.

Focus Question

When have you had to pay the price for believing in something?

SCRIPTURE SHARING AND REFLECTION

(The scriptures are proclaimed aloud with a pause after each reading. Following a pause after the gospel reading, the facilitator invites members to mention a word, a phrase or an image from one of the readings that particularly struck them this week. Members then read over the commentary and consider the questions in silence for several minutes before entering into conversation.)

Commentary

Faith in the Lord is certainly not for the faint of heart. Malachi's prophecy is a terrifying vision for the doers of evil. (Thank God we're *never* like them.) Paul threatens to withhold food from slackers and gossipers. (Thank God we're *never* like that.) Jesus' apocalyptic warning offers peace. But good God, what a price! Living a faithful life, brothers and sisters, is work, hard work, healing work, holy work.

The world sings the praises of justice, moral integrity and faith during persecution, but it is easier to sing than sacrifice, whine than work, point fingers than fold them in prayer, run from the fire than hold high the torch. Paul's message to the Thessalonians was that a quiet productive life is a powerful gospel model.

These readings are warnings. The structures of injustice will be razed. Evil will be confounded. Our lives will be judged.

The critical question is who will stand and give testimony for us? The answer may depend upon who we've given testimony for during our lives. Have we stood up for the poor, the oppressed, the lost or the lonely? Have we uncovered the wisdom and cobbled the courage to turn our self-reflecting mirrors into windows that open to others? Or have we been guilty of gossip, meddling, prejudice or timid witness to our faith in Jesus Christ?

Jesus warns us not to be enamored of what man has made, deceived by words,

terrified by violence, or naive about others' betrayals. "By your perseverance you will secure your lives." Those who stand with God now, will stand with God forever.

The end will come for all of us. But for the faithful, Malachi promises that the rays of the Son will illuminate our lives. Paul assures us, brothers and sisters, that if we're willing to work for God, we will be fed. Jesus proclaims that courage is the evidence of faith and will not go unrewarded. Fear wilts in the heat of God's word. He will raise us up.

In today's culture of volunteer victims, many are wary of accepting the disciplines of scripture. Yet we are not called to carry our monogrammed pillows into heaven. We are called to carry the cross of Christ. We may be tempted, terrified, tested, ridiculed, persecuted, hated, and some of us even possibly killed, all for our faith in Jesus. When we take the eternal view, we know that whatever the price, God offers us the deal of a lifetime. Courage!

FAITH SHARING AND INTEGRATION

- ◆ Where do you draw the line between justice and mercy?
- ◆ How do you distinguish between the truly needy and the lazy greedy?
- ◆ Share something about a tough time through which you persevered?
- ◆ Describe a difficult situation in which you dared to share your faith. What was the response?
- ◆ If you were on trial for being a follower of Jesus, *what* would be the evidence that would convict you?

RESPONSE IN ACTION

- ◆ Share your faith in Jesus with a family member this week. If fear prevents you from doing this, discuss with someone the cause of your fear.
- ◆ Anonymously sponsor a soup to nuts Thanksgiving meal for a needy family in your parish this year.

- ◆ Resist when you are tempted to meddle sometime this week. Resist when you are invited into gossip this week.

CLOSING PRAYER

(The leader invites the community to some moments of silent prayer. After a time of quiet, the leader invites members to stand. Taking up the pillow in one hand and the crucifix in the other, the leader addresses the community: “Sisters, brothers, the Lord calls us not to clutch our pillows, but to embrace the cross.” Setting aside the pillow, the leader kisses the crucifix. The crucifix is then passed among the members to be venerated in like manner. When the crucifix has been passed to all, the community prays the “Glory Be.”

The session concludes with the exchange of a sign of peace.)

Special Note: *Before members depart, the leader asks them to bring some pictures of deceased and living members of their family with them to next week’s session:*

