

33rd Sunday Ordinary Time Year “C”
November 16-17, 2019

The Sun of Justice will rise.

Readings: Malachi 3:19-20; 2 Thess. 3:7-12; Luke 21:5-19

“Wait until your father gets home.” These words struck fear and trepidation into the minds of my siblings and me on the relatively rare occasions in which it was invoked. The waiting was not one of joyful anticipation, but one of the hope of future mercy, as we carefully rehearsed our defense in preparation of his return. When the Bible uses the phrase, “Lo, the day is coming,” it was seen as a significant introductory phrase—that which followed was important! It made everyone stand up a little straighter and pay attention.

The prophet Malachi describes three types of people: (1) evil doers who apparently flourish, (2) the begrudgingly obedient who envy evil-doers, and (3) the Lord’s servants who trust in His Name. He effectively reduces it to two basic categories: the just and the wicked—those who serve God and those who do not. For, while the begrudgingly obedient may perform their duty, they do so without love. Their hearts long for something else. They long for the evil doers’ apparent, though illusory prosperity.

Since the service of God is fundamentally a service of love, the begrudgingly obedient fail to serve Him in truth. A judgment in fire awaits them along with the evil-doers whom they envy, whereas for those who fear the Lord’s Name, that is, for those who serve Him faithfully in love, “there will arise the sun of justice with its healing rays.” For Christians, this phrase has a deeper significance.

In the liturgical Office for the Feast of the Blessed Virgin, we read: “You are happy O holy virgin Mary, and most worthy of all praise: Because from you arose the Sun of Justice, Christ our God.”¹

¹ *Quia ex te ortus est Sol iustitiae, Christus Deus noster.* Gradual from the Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The phrase is not limited to Catholic liturgical texts. Founded in 1766, Rutgers (NJ) is one of the nation's eight oldest universities and the site of what is recognized as college football's first game 150 years ago. Once affiliated with the Dutch Reformed Church, its official seal in Latin is still used on its diplomas, where are written the words, "Sun of Justice, illuminate also the West."² Clearly a reference to Jesus Christ, invoked to illumine the campus.

Yet, their website says: "It is today interpreted as a request for the enlightenment of learning to shine equally upon the New World." This is what happens when schools abandon their historical Christian roots. The light of Christ is now the enlightenment.

Malachi speaks of a refining judgment against "evildoers" such as sorcerers, adulterers, perjurers and those who oppress the widows and orphans. But for those who keep the laws of Moses, there is no need of fear. Blessings upon the vines and fields will be bestowed on those who do what is right and all nations will call them blessed.

The image of the furnace is brought to bear, with the group of those who fear the Lord will experience the healing warmth of the sun of justice. Since the 3rd century, Jesus has been honored with the title, "Sun of Justice," because he is the Lord of creation and the light that came into the world to dispel sin and darkness.

In his treatise on the six days of creation St. Ambrose wrote this concerning Jesus: "Therefore God the father says: let there be the sun; and the Son has made the sun. For it was appropriate that the Sun of Justice should make the sun of the world."³ A phrase from the Old Testament is enshrined in the liturgy of the Church, seen as precursor to our Lord and Savior. The Litany of the Holy Name of Jesus gives voice to this: "Jesus, Sun of Justice, have mercy on us."

² *Sol iustitiae et occidentem illustra*

³ St. Ambrose, *Hexaemeron libri VI (et Filius fecit solem)*

The early Christians marveled at creation, seeing it as a reflection of the grandeur of God. They paid attention to the changing seasons, and the imagery surrounding them. Today, I fear we marvel much more at technology, seeing in it humanity's progress and triumph, rather than a sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit in our world.

Jesus warns us in the Gospel that the days are coming when there will not be a stone left upon another stone, but that through our perseverance we will secure our lives, a clear reference to our salvation. If the strong words in all of this week's readings do not shake us up a bit, I am afraid we have become completely numb.

“Lo, the day is coming.” We must be prepared, prepared to give our testimony, and seeking warmth and shelter under the loving arms of our Savior Jesus Christ, the Sun of Justice.