

33<sup>rd</sup> Sunday (B)

18<sup>th</sup> November 2018

'Fright and reassurance'

Dan 12: a time of great distress

Ps 15: You will not let Your beloved

know decay

Heb 10: *Christ has offered one single sacrifice for sins*

Mk 13: 24–32: *the second coming*

Is that Gospel passage supposed to be frightening us, do you think — all that talk of cosmic disasters, the light of sun and moon and stars fading out at the end of the world? As we come towards the end of the Church's year — just two weeks to go till Advent starts — the readings draw our attention to the passing of material things, even the things that to our short lifespan look fixed and permanent, the vast things of space, sun, moon and stars. Yet they are not permanent. A long-term scientific view makes this quite clear. In fact, it's only their changing and passing that makes our existence even possible: the atomic elements that make up the bodies of living things, ourselves included, were forged inside a previous generation of stars that died and exploded billions of years ago. Jesus reminds us that the material world passes, and that that's part of His divine plan. But that other things remain. And so the 'fright' that the passage seems to contain is countered by the reassurance

that Jesus then utters: "The Son of Man will come on the clouds of heaven with great power and glory ... Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away." I imagine those words booming out across the universe, reminding us of what really matters, and giving us hope. More permanent than the vast structures of space, Our Lord's message is timeless and trustworthy. We can rely on Him without any fears: He is the Creator of all, but prizes our spiritual relationship with Him above all other things.

Surely, in this month of November, and particularly this weekend when we remember specially and pray for the deceased of the past 12 months, we need that reassurance that comes from the mouth of our Blessed Lord. No more than the universe is permanent, is our earthly life. We might try to live as if our life on earth is fixed and permanent, but it's just not true, and we mustn't live as if it is. Again, the Lord doesn't say this to frighten us, but so that He might offer the reassurance that He, as the risen, almighty Lord, alone can do. "My words will not pass away," He reminds us. His Gospel is the lifeline that we

hold on to in the face of mortal death. The material of this universe, and our earthly bodies, are not made for eternity, but our souls, and our remade glorified risen bodies re-joined to our souls at the final Resurrection, are. This is the heart of the Good News. This is the message that Jesus's words ring out across the universe, and across all time: His words that shall not pass away. The Gospel is always one of divine reassurance, in the face of the fright that we may sometimes feel as weak, frail creatures of dust.

As we bring to the Lord with great love this weekend our prayers for the 36 members of our parish who have died in the past 12 months, it has to be with that reassuring sense of Christian hope that the Lord gives us. Some of our deceased loved ones this year have lived on into their 90s, but others have only been in the 50s. The Lord doesn't give us reasons or an expectation of a long life or a short one, any more than He gives us an indication of when He will bring all things to their close at the end of the world. It's not something that He gives us to know, in His wisdom. We are given the gift of life to use well in the present, in the

day to day, every day: not to waste this gift of life, but to thank Him for it, full of faith, and in the light of His Gospel to love Him and love our neighbour as He would wish. We thank Our Lord for those who lived amongst us and gave us so much as their families, friends and fellow pilgrims in life. We ask that God apply to them the even greater gifts of forgiveness, and eternal life with Him; and to help us in our bereavement to have that reassurance that He gives, and not that fear that the world that lives as if without God gives.

Let's gaze into the visions of the night, and see with the eyes of faith the Lord Jesus in His cosmic victory, bringing His elect, His beloved people, through the time of trial and sadness to the bliss of eternity. He made us for eternity: this is why He has given us, and not the rest of visible creation, immortal souls. Let's rejoice with Him that in His Resurrection He began that victory procession, and let's fall in behind Him, so that we are without fear heading for heaven. May our prayers assist those who have gone before us to be marked also with that sign of life eternal, that they too are with Christ and shall be blessed for ever.