

One of my former schoolmates, who lives in Melbourne, makes his living in Sydney on weekends. I asked him exactly ‘what you do?’, And how can two day’s work, Friday and Saturday, actually support his lifestyle. To be honest, he has a most extravagant lifestyle. His answer was to the point.

“I’m an auctioneer and an excellent one at that. I live off the commissions. I sell properties and estates, and I concentrate on the harbourside mansions side of town.

And then, after a fine meal on the town, I fly back to Melbourne on Sunday, and work from home. Sometimes.”

Well, good luck to him! I know, growing up his life was tough, and the family struggled, and for him, it seems to be a happy ever after story.

His mother was a widow, and I know that she made many sacrifices to send him to school. I know that people in the Parish would make sure that they had food, but still, his Mum was always generous to others around her. She would, as they say, give the shirt off her back if it meant making sure others did not miss out.

It is not so much the affluence of my old schoolmate that stands out for me, it is actually the story of his mother that puts today’s reading into an authentic place for me. It was in the sacrifice that the widowed mother made to support her only child and to make sure he received the best possible education that made me sit up and take notice of today’s readings.

Hannah, having wanted a child so much, was often seen in tears and mistaken for being drunk. Not to have a child, especially a son, was a matter of great shame. Yet, in her prayer life, she was prepared to do what was required by God. She prayed, she listened to the prophets, and her prayers were answered. She gave birth to the child Samuel, and once he was weaned, her shame was lifted, and happiness complete. She then sacrificed it all for him to have the best education possible – that of a religious upbringing.

To give up one’s son is at the heart of the reading from the letter to the Hebrews. In this case, it is the incarnate Son of God, Jesus our Lord. His one sacrifice for the sanctified, that is, the ones that God calls Holy, is suitable for all time. There is no need to offer such a sacrifice again, but as beneficiaries of this most marvellous gift of God, through the resurrection from the dead, and the sealing with the Holy Spirit, we are called to

... hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful.

10:24 And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds,

10:25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.¹

And at that point, our lectionary segues into the apocalyptic ending for the temple of Jerusalem.

It is a long way around, but there is unity in today’s stories. The lifting of shame and the answering of prayer, to be followed by the giving of all to God’s glory. The prophet Samuel was indeed a strong profit who anointed the first kings of Israel. His name, meaning “God has

¹ Hebrews 10.23b-25

listened” is also poignant as God hears Israel’s prayers for a king and so the royal line of Saul and then David is established.

Hannah’s song, a precursor to the Song of Mary, tells of all the good things that God has not only done but will do. It is both exultations as much as it is prophecy. Although we sang today the Magnificat, the text intent is almost as identical, although, in Hannah’s song, there is a little more prophecy regarding what awaits those who choose not to follow the teaching of God.

The LORD makes poor and makes rich; he brings low, he also exalts.

2:8 He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honour. For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and on them, he has set the world.

2:9 "He will guard the feet of his faithful ones, but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness; for not by might does one prevail.

2:10 The LORD! His adversaries shall be shattered.²

And looking at the second temple, the apocalyptic prophecy is given voice by Jesus. Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down."

And indeed, they were. But then followed later on the Mount of Olives, advice as to when this could be.

"Beware that no one leads you astray.

13:6 Many will come in my name and say, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray.

13:7 When you hear of wars and rumours of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come.

13:8 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs.³

And as Saint Paul was later to write, indeed, the whole creation is in birth pangs as we await the arrival of our Lord and Saviour to judge both the quick and the dead. In the meantime, we are reminded in Hebrews to get on with our lives and calling.

Often when people hear the word apocalyptic, they are immediately concerned and often confused with the end time prophecies that many read into the book of Revelation. Scratching the surface with them, what I usually find is that there is a confusing of the great battle on the planes of Megiddo, Armageddon, and the term apocalypse. Hollywood doesn't make it any easier for people to rid themselves of that confusion when they bring out blockbuster films about the end of the world and call it Apocalypse.

Without going too deep into the writings of John the Divine in the Revelation he received, we need to look first at chapter 21 and remind ourselves that all that was seen in the style of literature and writing has in fact taken place. The reign of God has begun, and it was in Jesus who descended to the dead that the battles have occurred. There is something still somewhat

² 2 Sameul 2.1-10

³ Luke 13.5b-8

prophetic about the action on the plains of Megiddo, the great Armageddon that is yet to come. All three of the great Abrahamic faiths: Jews, Christians and Islam recognise this particular place as being significant in the promised return of the Messiah.

The style of prophecy and writing is called apocalyptic not because of the end time and violent manner of the ending. The word means to unveil or expose. The origin of the word goes back to the shining countenance of Moses when he reflected the love and grandeur of God after coming down from the mountain. To counter the superstition that to look at the image of God was to die surely, he wore a veil on his face when addressing Israel.

In the Temple, the apocalyptic moment was when Jesus died on the cross, the veil that hid the Holy of Holies was ripped, unveiling the full presence of God to those who were inside. A bride, if using the veil, provides an apocalyptic moment when the bridegroom enters the chamber and lifts the veil, revealing the image of God that is reflected in their union.

And so, what is Jesus trying to unveil in his end-time prophecy? We need to go back to the verses before the lection in today's gospel passage, and the context becomes even more evident as we lift the veil on what prompted the disciples' outburst. It may also raise the veil on why I began today talking about my mate and his widowed mother.

Jesus sat down opposite the treasury and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many wealthy people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them, 'Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.'

13.1 As he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!"⁴

Talk about missing the point. Like Hannah, this one woman gave all she had to the glory of God. She had been provoked into good deeds and worked and attended the assembly, the Temple, as required. She did so in humility and respect. And yet, all around her, people, including the disciples, were taken by the transcendence of the structure, and not by the works of God.

At the end of time, whenever that may be, it is not the grandeur of what we have accumulated "for God" that will be judged. That will be soon overturned and returned to the ground. No, it will be in the honouring of God with all our heart, mind, and soul that will be unveiled, as well as our love of our neighbours as ourselves.

Jesus tells us clearly not to worry about the end of time, and not to be disturbed by the wars and great portents (storms, cyclones, earthquakes...) for all of these will come to pass. When he returns, it will be the contrite heart (Psalm 51) that will be examined, not the grandeur and stewardship of our buildings. We have a responsibility to provide the structures for the work of God to occur. The moment we worship the premises, we lose sight of our mission.

⁴ Luke 12.44-13.1

So, a widow, giving her all reminded me today of a mate who arrived at where he is through the hard work of his mother. What does he do when he is not selling up Sydney? He administers a charitable trust quietly and helps others to do vicariously what he can't do. There is no trumpeting about it, and you won't find his name on any honour board. I could tell you who he is, but that is not for me to provide the apocalyptic moment.

Let us, today, as we mark the end of our financial and temporal Church year keep in mind our stewardship of the mission entrusted to us, and always, always, keep in mind the missionary work in the Lower Macedon Ranges: Gisborne, Riddells Creek, Macedon, Mount Macedon and surrounds, that has been entrusted to us to the glory of God the Father, empowered by the Spirit, and in the name of the incarnate presence of Jesus Christ our Lord.

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