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**From the Selected Works of Reverend Lawrence E. Frizzell, D.Phil.**

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# Mulling Judgment without Millennial Fears

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## **Mulling Judgment without Millennial Fears**

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## **Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Sunday Readings for November 14, 2010 for Cycle C:

Mal 3:19-20, Ps 98, 2 Thes 3:7-12, Lk 21:5-19

### **MULLING JUDGMENT WITHOUT MILLENNIAL FEARS**

*Lawrence E. Frizzell*

Once, with a whirl of thought oppressed,  
I sunk from reverie to rest.  
A horrid vision seized my head;  
I saw the graves give up their dead!  
(Jonathan Swift, 1667-1745)

As we approached another millennium some 15 years ago there was an increase of predictions about "the end of the world." Jesus warned against trying to predict "the day and the hour" (see Mt 24:36; Acts 1:7) but this admonition is ignored by some devout Christians. The reality of the last judgment is an integral part of Jesus' teaching, and our weak and sinful condition is the reason for this to be an ominous event. In reality, this consummation of history should be welcomed with joy because the very purpose of creation is God's plan for creatures to be in perfect and harmonious communion with the Blessed Trinity and each other. Why would Dean Swift or anyone sense horror at the resurrection of the dead? Only because the universal blight of sin has marred the human creature and thereby the world. Wielding his pen as the sword of satire, Swift places the following description into God's mouth:

Offending race of human kind,  
By nature, custom, learning blind;  
You who through frailty slipped aside,  
And you who never fell - through pride.

This echoes the vision of divine wrath recorded by the last of Israel's prophets, who lived sometime after the Jews had returned from Babylonian exile and rebuilt the Temple (515 BC). "Behold, the day is coming, blazing like an oven, when all the proud and all evildoers will be stubble" (Mal 3:19). However, the farmer burns stubble and weeds only after the harvest has been garnered, so Malachi presupposes an experience of peace for the righteous. Human beings are incapable of achieving perfect right order or integrity of their own effort, so the prophet called for awe before God as the foundation for divine gifts. "But for you who fear (revere) my Name, there will arise the sun of justice (integrity) with healing in its wings" (3:20). Although the wicked deserve the punishment of consuming fire, God will bestow light, warmth and health upon the people who acknowledge the authority of their Creator. Did Malachi mean that pride and other sins constitute the deepest wound requiring the healing touch of the divine Physician? Indeed he knew that integrity is a divine gift rooted in the Covenant (see Mal 3:1-3), so here he proclaimed that the mysterious "sun of justice" would prepare the humble for judgment.

The Temple in Jerusalem was the focal point for the life of Israel; this fact is noted frequently by St. Luke. "To the place which the LORD, your God, chooses as the dwelling place for his Name you shall bring all the offerings which I command you" (Deut 12:11). The Name of God manifests the divine presence, which inspires awe and obedience. Certainly the somber words of Jesus must have surprised his disciples, who marveled at the beauty of God's House. "When will this occur, Teacher?" Jesus' answer is preceded by a warning that false prophets would make assertions in his name. As for predictions of the end-time, so warnings about the destruction of Jerusalem required careful evaluation by the Church and her members. The description of confusion that is so vivid in the Gospel merely echoes themes of previous experiences of Israel. "Nation crushed nation and city crushed city, for God destroyed them by every kind of adversity" (2 Chr 15:6; see Isa 19:2). After Jerusalem fell to the Roman legions in AD 70, the Jewish historian Josephus reported that a false prophet led people to the Temple "to receive the signs of their salvation" and they perished in the flames (*Jewish War* VI. 5.2 #285). What a responsibility teachers carry toward those who follow them! Swift was biting in his comment:

And you by differing churches shammed,  
Who come to see each other damned  
(so some folks told you, but they knew  
No more of Jove's designs than you).

Knowing that in every age some will exploit the naiveté of the ordinary folks in their community, we exercise critical judgment in evaluating "the signs of times". The advice of St. Paul rings true: "Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophetic utterances. Test everything; hold fast to what is good (1 Thes 5:19-22).

One thing is certain for the disciples of Jesus. They will be persecuted for adhering to the true and good message of Jesus. Why? Because this fidelity will irk those who exploit the poor and practice injustice to satisfy the greed that ignores divine judgment. The faithful will be called to bear witness to the Name and teaching of Jesus. This requires a lifetime of learning and prayer but in the time of crisis, the Holy Spirit will enlighten and guide us. "I bid you resolve not to worry about your defense beforehand, for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict" (Lk 21:15). Perseverance in the slow process of spiritual growth will be rewarded by patient endurance of trials. Thus will we find the gift of salvation; whether the end of our own lives precedes or coincides with "the end of the world", intimate union with Christ, the suffering Servant of God, is all that matters.