

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This weekend's readings may seem a bit harrowing... but then again, at the end of the liturgical year, they always get this way. Next weekend is the last weekend of the Church year (we celebrate "Jesus Christ the King of the Universe"), and it is a reminder that this world will end. The Church reminds us through these readings that it is easy to fall into the trap of focusing on the here-and-now as the only reality.

In the first reading, Malachi tells us

Lo, the day is coming, blazing like an oven, when all the proud and all evildoers will be stubble, and the day that is coming will set them on fire, leaving them neither root nor branch, says the LORD of hosts. (Mal 3:19)

Christ echoes this in the Gospel

All that you see here – the days will come when there will not be left a stone upon another stone that will not be thrown down. (Luke 21:6)

God reminds us that we have to live for Him, not for this world alone.

Too often we focus on short-term pleasure instead of long-term happiness. We see this in how we will "cheat" on a diet for a momentary pleasure instead of holding fast for better health. The inability to discipline our wills is very much responsible for many people's out-of-control credit card debt. Today's readings plead with us to look long-term – to look *eternally*. Everything in this world is passing. While it is not wrong to enjoy the things of this world, it is wrong to do so at the expense of eternity.

Imagine a family that is struggling to make ends meet. Day after day, week after week, they get further and further behind on paying the mortgage, the utilities, and barely can get food on the table. It would make no sense for the family to take an extravagant vacation that would jeopardize their survival when they returned. Yet, this is what we do all the time with eternity. We jeopardize our eternal happiness in order to have temporary pleasure.

We see this in the way that we use others instead of loving them (refer back to my homily from last weekend). We see this in the way we refuse to go to Sunday Mass (remember keeping holy the Sabbath is one of the Ten Commandments) because of unnecessary work, sports, or recreation. We see this in the way we spend hours watching TV, movies, YouTube, or playing video games, and yet cannot spare twenty minutes in prayer to Almighty God. We see this in the ways we are dishonest, full of vengeance, and hateful. We see this in the ways that we reject God's teachings in the Bible and in the Church, and make ourselves little gods determining what is right and wrong.

Malachi warns us, "**the day is coming like a blazing oven**" (Mal 3:19), and Jesus reminds us that everything – *everything* – in this world will be destroyed. Each of us is going to die and come face to face with the God of the universe.

Does this mean we should be afraid? Not necessarily – it just means we need to be prepared. Malachi ends today's passage by saying

But for you who fear my name, there will arise the sun of justice with its healing rays. (Mal 3:20)

And Jesus ends today's Gospel by saying

Not a hair on your head will be destroyed. By your perseverance you will secure your lives. (Lk 21:19)

There is hope. When we look at Malachi's "sun of justice" – what can be hotter than the sun? Certainly not the "blazing oven" he spoke of earlier. Yet, it is the sun that brings "healing rays"! What does this mean? By giving ourselves over to God, by trusting Him, by flying to Him for mercy and forgiveness, by living our lives with Him as the *first priority*, we will experience His "blazing oven" as "healing rays." This means that the inferno of love blazing in the Heart of God will not destroy us, but will set us on fire for love of Him.

The question is whether we build our lives on straw – the things of this world that are passing away – or on solid foundation – Jesus Christ, who is the same yesterday, today and forever.