

Homily ~ November 14-15, 2009 ~ Holy Trinity Parish, Hudson[St. Mary's]-Germantown
[Resurrection], NY

32nd Sun in Ordinary Time, B cycle

1st Reading: Daniel 12:1-3 [the wise shall shine like the stars in the sky]

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 16 [you will not abandon me to the netherworld] "You are my inheritance,
O Lord"

2nd Reading: Hebrews 10:11-14, 18 [Christ, our high priest, has forgiven our sins]

Gospel: Mark 12:13:24-32 [Learn a lesson from the fig tree]

Listen to this hymn. Can you name that tune?

!!!♪ Now the green blade rises from the buried grain,
Wheat that in the dark earth many days has lain;
Love lives again, that with the dead has been:
Love is come again like wheat arising green. ♪

The story of the fig tree led me to that song. It's an Easter hymn, set to the melody of a French Christmas carol, but it points to what we celebrate at this Mass, and in every Eucharist: the core of the Good News: *Christ has died, Christ IS risen, Christ will come again.*

Jesus talks about the troubles in his own time, very similar to what happened on Sept. 11, 2001 in NYC, Washington, DC and PA. The event that caused such fear and chaos then was the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem at the end of a war between the Romans and Jewish militants called zealots.

Jesus talks about a fig tree coming back to life after a winter of apparent death. Earlier in this chapter, he calls the pains his followers are experiencing pains of birth.

There were a lot of fig trees in my grandparents home town of Cugnoli, in the mountains of Abruzzi in Italy. It was not as warm in Wappingers Falls, NY, where they moved to in this country. But they wanted to have a fig tree. My grandfather *had* to have a fig tree. But the cold weather and frost in New York State would have killed the fig tree in the winter.

So just before Thanksgiving every year my mother's family would get together to bury the fig tree. They would dig a trench, tie the branches to the trunk, tip the tree over with the help of an old pick up truck then cover it with dirt and bury it for the winter. And, of course, there would be a party! In late April or May, after the ground had thawed, they would dig it out & stand it up. And again there would be a party!

The sap would rise, the leaves would come out again and it would bear figs in August. I remember eating them.

I learned many lessons from that fig tree:

I learned that working together could bring joy and unity, even though the November weather chilled you to the bone.

I learned that it was possible to believe in life even when the evidence pointed to death. I learned that sometimes being buried did not mean you were dead.

For me, the buried fig tree is an image of Christ, who died on a cross, was buried in a tomb and was raised from the dead.

It also reminds me of the community of his disciples, those who believed the promises of Jesus, a community which survived both the destruction of the Temple and the fall of the Roman Empire. We are that community which survives to this very day.

We are sometimes like my grandfather's fig tree - we get buried by fear, by concern about being liked or anxiety about money, or just by the busyness of life in our world. We need to hear the words Christ says today,

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away."

We run from one thing to another, and can miss the most important things in life. What are the most important realities in your life?

It has been said that if you want to know what is really most important, as opposed to what you say is important, take a good look at your calendar and your checkbook, they will tell you. What do you choose to spend your money and your time doing?

Sunday Mass is a chance to stop, even for a moment, and look at what God says is most important. And what is that?

The Gospel passage says it is the *love* that can free us from death and the fear of death.

The Letter to the Hebrews says it is the *mercy* that makes even our sins fertilizer for our spiritual growth.

The book of Daniel says it is the *wisdom* that will guide us to truth and security, and make us shine like the splendor of the heavens.

God's promise for today is summed up in the little verse at the beginning of the Mass, the Entrance Antiphon. We replaced it with a hymn, but it is worth hearing, and going back to later. It is from the Prophet Jeremiah, chapter 29 verses 11, 12 & 14.

"The Lord says: my plans for you are peace and not disaster; when you call to me, I will listen to you, and I will bring you back to the place from which I exiled you."

Listen to the last verse of the song I began with:

♪ When our hearts are wintry, grieving, or in pain,
Your touch can call us back to life again,

Fields of our hearts that dead and bare have been:

LOVE IS COME AGAIN LIKE WHEAT ARISING GREEN. ♪