

Ordinary 33 Sunday - A - (Fr. Mark Starr)

Proverbs 31:10–13, 19–20, 30–31

Psalms 128:1–5

1 Thessalonians 5:1–6

Matthew 25:14–30

This week marks the 33rd Sunday in Ordinary time. Next week we conclude ordinary time with the solemnity of Christ the King (34th Sunday in ordinary time) and the following weekend we begin the new liturgical year. The Church has three Sunday cycles, Years A, B and C. We are in cycle year A, which is this year; we read from the Gospel of Matthew. In Advent, we begin a new cycle, thus this Advent through next year we will be in Cycle B and read mainly from Mark's Gospel and take a brief look at John's Gospel as well since Mark's Gospel is relatively short. Cycle C we read Luke's Gospel and then begin all over again with cycle A. We generally read from John's Gospel during the Easter Season. In lieu of speaking only on today's Gospel text from Matthew 25, I thought I would give us an overview of Matthew's Gospel before we complete it next week on the feast of Christ the King.

- Matthew: A Tax Collector turned disciple and evangelist

Matthew was a tax collector, therefore not thought of highly among the Jews, yet, he was called to be one of the disciples and ultimately one of the evangelists

– shows “God can use whoever he wants.” There is some discrepancy about the date of his writing and authorship. Why is the time of his writing important? Because the closer we have the actual writing of the Gospel, from the human perspective, the more accurate the presentation, as some things get lost over time. The original presentation of the Gospel was through oral tradition. Some scholars attribute the Gospel writing as late as the 2nd century – a few generations after the original disciples and thus claim that many aspects of the Gospel were created to try to persuade the people about Jesus. Looking at the text, Jesus prophesies of the destruction of the Temple in Matthew 24, where he says, "Truly I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another, that will not be thrown down." We know that the second destruction of the Temple came in AD 70, therefore some say Matthew must have been written afterward to reflect Jesus' words - but then this would not be a prophesy. But we know in Matthew 27 Jesus resurrection is narrated as a completed event when describing those that came out of the tombs - so we have a precedence for a completed event described. Therefore, mostly likely as Matthew narrates the destruction of the Temple as a future event and not something that has happened, we conclude that Matthew was written before AD 70. Most scholars attribute his Gospel to around AD 50-60. As Catholics, we know that every writer of Sacred Scripture was

divinely inspired by God – not that God whispered into their ears, but that God used them divinely through their human elements to write no more nor no less than what God desired. All Scripture is divinely inspired.

Some argue that Matthew, a simple Jew, would not have been able to write in the elegant Greek, which he uses. Looking at culture and society of the Jews at this time it is possible that Greek was spoken and more common than some might think. It is possible Jesus himself was fluent in Greek.

- Matthew: One of three Synoptic Gospels

Matthew, along with Mark and Luke are what we call the "synoptic" Gospels, meaning that they are written from a historical perspective and narrate a historical progression. John's Gospel, on the other hand, does not necessarily follow a historical progression (although it is historically accurate), but rather it is written from the perspective of the Glory of God. He presents Jesus as the fulfillment of all the Jewish feasts and presents Jesus from the perspective of his Deity. We read in John in his first chapter "and the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us."

- Structure of Matthew (5 discourses – some like to relate each discourse 5 books of the Pentateuch. I am not sure that was Matthew's intention, but he clearly describes five distinct discourses) – The five discourses are

sandwiched between the prologue and the epilogue of the Gospel. Each discourse ends with “And when Jesus had finished these sayings” (A few narratives in between and then the next discourse)

- First Discourse: "**Sermon on the Mount**": 5–7
- Second Discourse: "**Missionary Instructions**": 10 (Jesus calls the 12 to go out and preach the kingdom of heaven”
- Third Discourse: "**Collection of Parables**": 13 (Sower and Seed, mustard seed . . . “The kingdom of heaven is like . . .”
- Fourth Discourse: "**Community Instructions**": 18 (Forgiving of sins, the lost sheep)
 - Narrative: 19–22 – discourse with the scribes and Pharisees, elders and chief priests
- Fifth Discourse: "**Sermon on Eschatology**": 23–25 (Parable of the Talents – final judgement on the nations)
- Matthew: Use of Old Testament Prophecies and the Law

Matthew's use of the Old testament is rich and complex; therefore, it is taken that he is writing to a Jewish audience or at least those who would be very familiar with Judaism. Matthew starts out saying Jesus Christ is the son of David, the son of Abraham - he emphasizes the royal lineage of Jesus and begins his

ancestral lineage beginning with Abraham down to Joseph, the husband of Mary of whom Jesus was born. Joseph receives the annunciation of Jesus' birth in a dream. Joseph names the child and most importantly, by virtue of his adoption of the child, it is Joseph who gives Jesus his royal lineage, whereas in Luke we have Jesus genealogy through Mary back to Adam the son of God - his human lineage.

- Descendent of David – prophesy of Jesus birth by an angel - HUGE

Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham who is told "And your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies, and by your descendants shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves" (Gen 22). King David is told by the Lord: "I will raise up your heir after you, sprung up from your loins, and I will make your kingdom firm" (2 Samuel 7). Jesus' birth is foretold by an angel - this is huge from the Jewish mindset - we only have this a few times: the birth of Isaac, Samuel, Samson and John the Baptist are those prophesied by angels. Matthew narrates the visit of the Magi, Gentiles, who visit this King. Later Jesus will have "King of the Jews" inscribed over his head at his crucifixion.

Many times, we read in Matthew these words: "all this took place to fulfill what was said by the prophet" (Matt 1, 2, 27..). Matthew even has Jesus quote from scripture when he is arrested saying he could call on his father who would send twelve legions of angels; but Jesus does not because he asks: "how else

would scripture be fulfilled?" (Matt 27). Matthew repeatedly illustrates Jesus as being the fulfillment of the Law and the prophets - emphasizing the Jewish perspective. He shows Jesus as - the "New Moses," the "Super-Moses." In Matthew 11, Jesus is asked by John the Baptist's disciples: "Are you the one who is to come or is there another?" The Jews were awaiting another Moses, another prophet who would save the people again from the grip of slavery - remember all of Israel was under Roman rule at that time. Moses carried the people through the Red Sea in their freedom from Egypt, and Jesus walks on top the water in the Sea of Galilee. In Matthew's presentation of the "Sermon on the Mount" (Matt 5, 6, 7), we read that Jesus went up the mountain, reference to Moses going up the mountain to receive the law, and then it says when he had sat down he began to preach to them (Matt 5). This is the way teachers would have taught students in the Jewish tradition. Luke's presentation of the Sermon narrates Jesus coming down the mountain to teach in this respect he is shown in his humanity. They are also looking for the Messiah to be a king – "Son of David." It is David who was the king who amassed the largest land area in the history of Israel.

- Moses' farewell – Jesus' the Great Commission

At the end of his life, after preaching to the people in Deuteronomy (remember the entire book of Deuteronomy is Moses' final farewell message the

last thirty days of his life as he prepares to depart and Israel enters the Promised Land), Moses goes up the mountain where the Lord takes him home and we read "and there has not arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face" (Deut. 34). At the end of Matthew's Gospel, the eleven disciples go to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them, and there they see him face to face where he gives them the "Great Commission," to go baptize all nations, teaching them to observe all I have commanded you. Lo I am with you to the end of the age" (Matt 28).

- Fulfillment of the prophet Ezekiel: "I will open your graves"

After Jesus dies on the cross in Matthew 27, we read that there was an earthquake and many of the saints who had fallen asleep came out of the tombs, and went into the holy city and appeared to many. Matthew is making an obvious allusion to the prophet Ezekiel, who prophesies to the Israel during the Babylonian Captivity before they return to rebuild the Temple when he says: "And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people" (Ezekiel 37).

We see, from the Jewish perspective that Matthew has shown Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah, the king who comes from the loins of king David, and the fulfillment of the Law and the prophets. His kingdom will have no end.

Central to Matthew's message are the Beatitudes. If you remember nothing else from this homily - remember Matthew 5, 6 and 7 are the Beatitudes and Jesus Sermon on the Mount. In this sermon, we Jesus says: "the kingdom of heaven is at hand," and Matthew illustrates God's ever abiding presence in the life of his people. Matthew uses many Old Testament scripture references to show God's ever-abiding presence in the life of his people, Israel, and finally, in the final words of Jesus before his ascension, Jesus tells his disciples "and lo, I am with you always till the end of the age." That is the Good News we celebrate in Matthew - the kingdom of God is at hand. As we close out Cycle A in our Gospel readings and the Gospel of Matthew, may we give thanks for God's ever abiding presence in throughout the history of mankind - and rejoice that the fullness of God's life in us comes to us through Jesus Christ, the fulfillment of all Old Testament prophecies and the one who lives and reigns as Christ the King - that which we will celebrate next weekend as we finish this liturgical year. Praised be Jesus Christ!