33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C Nov. 13, 2016

Malachi 3:19-20

Psalm98

2 Thessalonians 3:7-12

Luke 21:5-19

“But for you who fear my name…”

Fear is a wonderful word. In the Roman Catholic tradition “fear of the Lord” is a wonderful thing –one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In this context fear is a sense of wonder and awe with a side of reverence and mystery. See a rainbow and you say, “Oh, my God. How wonderful.”

Yet it also implies a fear of judgement by God – fearing punishment because of the wrong things we do. “I’ll put the fear of God in you.”

Fear is a two edged sword. It can lead to terror. It can lead to love.

With the prophet Malachi, the day will come like a blazing oven, scorching all who are proud and do evil. If you are a wrong doer, you better fear. And yet, if you take the prophets words to heart, fear can lead to conversion. Malachi also points out “But for you who fear my name, there will arise the sun of justice with its healing rays.” This kind of fear is the gateway to justice.

Jesus also talks about fear – fear of destruction of the temple, wars and insurrections, earthquakes, famines, and plagues, prison, betrayal and hate. Now there’s a basketful of fear. Yet Jesus says do not be terrified, you will secure your lives.

Fear is a checkpoint- either it will leave you paralyzed with terror or leave you in the palm of God’s hands. Fear makes you hyper-aware. It brings you to a crisis point. Face it. Explore it. Accept it. Respond. You can either run away or run to. Be a coward or be courageous. Fear can either blind you or help you see what you love.

Take the fear of death. We all fear death. It can leave you paralyzed or lead you to liberation. Every time we gather in church we celebrate the death of the Lord until he comes again in glory. It’s a weird Catholic thing. We even put the sign of the cross on ourselves not to make light of death but to help us realize that through death, there is life. Jesus has shown us that.

As Catholics we have to face and contemplate our own death. When we do, we can either go blind or else open our eyes on how we should be living our lives. At the time of our death do we want to be as stubble to be thrown into a blazing oven or do we want to stand erect and raise our heads because our redemption is at hand? The crisis of the contemplation of death can lead to a life well lived.

Let us not fear death as to leave us in terror. Let us contemplate death so as to be in awe that our life is a gift worth living well with courage and perseverance and by his death, Jesus death, we are set free to understand with awe and fear of the Lord that our God will see us through and bring us to a life everlasting.

Amen. Alleluia.