

Closing Prayer

God of steadfast love,
you ask your people to wait patiently
for the fulfilment of your purposes,
even though nations are in turmoil
and ancient certainties collapse.
Keep us faithful until the end,
and since you have called us
to your own kingdom and glory,
make us live amid this changing world
in a way that befits those
whom you desire to abide for ever.
We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord.

4 before Advent, Year A, *Celebrating the Christian Year*³

CPL • LBC Year A before Advent 4.odt • 2020-10-11

³ *Celebrating the Christian year : prayers and resources for Sundays, holy days and festivals, years A, B and C / compiled by Alan Griffiths. – 3 vols. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 2004-5.*

The Fourth Sunday before Advent

Sunday between 30 October and 5 November inclusive

Principal Service readings

Micah 3.5-12	A vision of God's judgement
Psalm 43	A prayer for deliverance
or Psalm 107.1-8	Give thanks to the Lord, for he is gracious
1 Thessalonians 2.9-13	The power of God's word is at work in believers
Matthew 24.1-14	Teaching about the end times

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

<title>

As Jesus came out of the temple and was going away, his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. ²Then he asked them, 'You see all these, do you not? Truly I tell you, not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.'

³When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, 'Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?' ⁴Jesus answered them, 'Beware that no one leads you astray. ⁵For many will come in my name, saying, "I am the Messiah!" and they will lead many astray. ⁶And you will hear of wars and rumours of wars; see that you are not alarmed; for this must take place, but the end is not yet. ⁷For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places: ⁸all this is but the beginning of the birth pangs.

⁹Then they will hand you over to be tortured and will put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of my name. ¹⁰Then many will fall away, and they will betray one another and hate one another. ¹¹And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. ¹²And because of the increase of lawlessness, the love of many will grow cold. ¹³But anyone who endures to the end will be saved.

¹⁴And this good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world, as a testimony to all the nations; and then the end will come.

Matthew 24.1-14 NRSV¹

Comments and Questions

The beginning of the discourse about the end times in Matthew (24.1-8) follows Mark's version (Mark 13.1-8) quite closely. Matthew misses out information about the Mount of Olives being 'opposite the Temple' (Mark 13.3), presumably as being unnecessary, and also the list of the four disciples who made up the 'inner circle' (Mark 13.3). He adds precision to Mark's vague 'when these things are all to be accomplished' (Mark 13.4) by linking them to the 'presence' of Jesus at the 'end of the age' (Matthew 24.3). Matthew also turns the ambiguous 'I am (he)' (Mark 13.6) into 'I am the Messiah' (Matthew 24.5).

In the second part of the discourse Matthew is freer in his approach to Mark. He adds detail that implies friction within the Christian community (Matthew 24.10-12), the appearance of false prophets, and the rise of lawlessness. His second major change is to place 'the gospel must be preached to all nations' (24.14) after the internal dissensions indicated in 24.10-12, thus effectively putting off the parousia and the end of the age, while placing the troubles within the community. The implication is that the Gentile mission must be carried out in its fullness before the end will come.

The 'end' refers to the end of the present age or world and the arrival of God's kingdom in its fullness. In Matthew's time the temple had been destroyed so what did God still have in store for Israel? Various lists of signs preceding the end can be found in Jewish apocalyptic literature of the late first century, such as 4 Ezra 9.3-4: 'there shall appear in the world earthquakes, tumult of peoples, intrigues of nations, wavering of leaders, confusion of princes ...'.² So Matthew agrees with the Jewish apocalyptic writers that the 'end and/or the coming of the Messiah would be accompanied by natural disasters and calamities. He counsels

¹ *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

² *The gospel of Matthew* / Daniel J. Harrington. – New ed. – Collegeville, Minnesota : Liturgical Press, 2007. – (Sacra pagina; 1). – 978-0-8146-5964-9

patience, saying that this is only the 'beginning of the birth pangs' (24.8), and that 'everyone who endures to the end will be saved' (24.13).

The Christian scenario Matthew envisages for the end of the world puts Matthew in dialogue with Jews outside the Christian circle, for it contradicted their alternative scenarios. Matthew helps Christians to see that the problems in their own community of things like desertions, animosity, and false prophets were within the compass of what must happen before the end.

For Christians down the ages, the mission to 'all nations' and the hope of the 'second coming' of Christ have been part of their theology. God is guiding the world towards its goal, despite the sufferings of the present time. The goal yet to be reached is the parousia and the end of this age when God's kingdom will be established in its fullness.

Quotations

1

Why is God landing in this enemy-occupied world in disguise and starting a sort of secret society to undermine the devil? Why is He not landing in force, invading it? Is it that He is not strong enough? Well, Christians think He is going to land in force; we do not know when. But we can guess why He is delaying. He wants to give us the chance of joining His side freely.

The case for Christianity / C. S. Lewis. 1942

2

We cannot be deaf to the question: 'Do I love this world so well that I have to know how it ends?'

The age of anxiety: a baroque eclogue / W.H. Auden. 1947

Related topics

For further study:

Eschatology; second coming; parousia; final judgement; reign of God; pilgrim church