

LUKE 21 V 5-19 & MALACHI 4V 1-2a
EYNSFORD 17-11-19/ST MARTIN PATRONAL

May I speak in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Today is our Patronal Day for Saint **Martin of Tours** who was a bishop of Tours in France and became one of the most famous and recognizable saints.

As a soldier in the Roman army, Martin shared his cloak with a freezing beggar and received a vision of Christ which moved him to renounce military life and become a monk. You will notice that on some of the kneelers at the high altar, and in the Lady Chapel have a picture of a torn cloak on them. He later became an abbot and then a bishop. He is known for his stand against heresy. In his monastic and clerical life, he simultaneously exhibited high standards of Christian humility and compassion. He was living out the Kings words in Matthew 25 verse 40, **And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, ^[G] you did it to me.**

Following his death, Martin's shrine soon became a well known pilgrimage site. The Church celebrates his feast day on November 11, but out of respect for Remembrance Day we have delayed this by a week.

How then does it fit in with our readings from Malachi and Luke, which is about the end days.

THE END OF THE WORLD IS NIGH! REPENT AND BE SAVED. This was on the front and back of a sandwich board carried by a man who used to walk up and down Hounslow High Street every Saturday morning when I was a boy.

Many people along the years have made predictions about when the end of the world is going to come. I can remember standing with my friends in our school playground during afternoon break, when I was in my teens as someone had predicted that the world was going to end on that particular day at something like 2.20 in the afternoon. We wouldn't want to miss such an event now would we? As you can see, it didn't happen.

In 2007 headlines on the front page of The Irish Times read, "Apocalypse Soon!" Just hang on in there. The end really is nigh. And here's a free CD to keep you entertained in the meantime.

And as one character in a classic comedy TV programme said "We're all doomed."

But are we? Is that what God wants for us?

Both the readings this morning from Malachi and Luke, talk about the end of the age. But if we read it fully, we're not all doomed.

In Malachi we read, "But you who revere my name, the son of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings."

And in Luke verse 15, it says, "But I will give you words of wisdom... and in verse 18 & 19 "But not a hair on your head will perish. By standing firm you will gain life."

We don't like a book when we find the last few pages missing. We don't like things to be unfinished, do we? We don't like half-baked pies or ideas. We aren't too fond of running out of paint just before the last wall in the room gets a coat. No one likes a runner who stops just short of the finish line. We like to know the ending. We like completion.

Everyone wants to know about the end of time. Books have been written about biblical prophecy. Many have stated days for the Lord's return which have long passed. But Jesus Himself warns us not to get preoccupied with times and seasons which are in the Father's authority. Only He knows the time. Yet we get a glimpse from Jesus of the end times. This morning's passage is one of them.

So it isn't surprising that, when Jesus starts talking about the way things will be "at the end of the Age," his disciples want to know "When, Lord? How will we know? What will be the sign that these things are about to take place?" But it also probably isn't surprising that Jesus doesn't give a cut-and-dried answer.

Jesus is preparing people for a future that's hard and will be hard. He's reminding them to stay flexible, to be open to the demands of the moment because they don't really know what's coming. Be ready. Be flexible. Be fluid. Be faithful.

The author of the book of Luke is doing that same work. Luke was written decades after the death of Jesus. But the Word and witness of Jesus remained in the midst of chaotic and dangerous times. Luke reminds early Christians of the need to be ready, to be flexible, to be fluid, and to be faithful in the face of uncertainty and sometimes at great risk and widespread violence throughout the world.

Sound familiar? Well that's how it is.

How's your week been? How are you feeling right now? I'm serious. How are you?

It has been a hard week for some folk.

The election campaign full on. Meetings going on, and lots of work to do as we seek a new incumbent. The floods in the North, fires in Australia. Unrest in some of the countries around the world. When we look at the world at the moment, it's not very pretty.

Jesus says verse 15 & 17 "¹⁵for I will give you words^ε and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict. ¹⁶You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, by relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. ¹⁷You will be hated by all because of my name". I don't think that sounds a very pleasant future! But then, Jesus, goes on to say, "¹⁸But not a hair of your head will perish. ¹⁹By your endurance you will gain your souls". So what does that mean?

How shall we endure the suffering that comes with being a follower of Jesus Christ?

We do that, ***By being a follower of Jesus Christ.***

For it is in following Christ that we gain our souls. Jesus offers us more than mere existence. He offers us life that is full, rich, abundant, and eternal.

Such life, such endurance, is God's gift freely given to all who believe, to all who claim Jesus both as Saviour and as Lord. No matter what trials we face, no matter what disasters overtake us, we have the power to endure to the very end if we accept God's gift to us. That gift of unshakeable faith will see us through whatever may come, whenever it happens.

The time may be short or long. We don't know. All the signs Jesus described to his disciples have been showing up for the past 2000 years. There have been earthquakes, famines, wars and insurrections. There's a quotation in the coffee shop in Shoreham by Martin Luther King, it reads, "You don't have to see the staircase, to take the first step.

You can't always see the end of a castle stairway, but you have the faith to climb and get to the top. Like the stairway we don't know when the world will end, but there's nothing to stop us now trusting in Jesus and following Him.

We can claim this promise of enduring, abundant, eternal life for ourselves. Do we accept, and continue to accept the invitation Jesus offers us? St Martin accepted the life that Jesus gave him, and he followed the path that Jesus led

him down. Let us receive the life that Jesus wants to give to us, a life of peace and wholeness, a life of joy, a life that has been changed, so that we are free of fear and able to endure? Now is the time.

St Martin, went through much, gave up much, endured much, but his faith in God was steadfast, let ours be also.

Let us pray.

*O Lord, open our hearts to your grace. Make us new. For those of us who have not made you their **Lord**, grant the willingness to surrender to you. For those of us whose hearts need re-kindling, light your flame in us that we might endure to the end, and gain our very souls. Through Jesus Christ our Lord we pray, Amen.*