

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Daniel:

Some men rushed into the upper chamber of Daniel's home and found him praying and pleading before his God. Then they went to remind the king about the prohibition: "Did you not decree, O king, that no one is to address a petition to god or man for thirty days, except to you, O king; otherwise he shall be cast into a den of lions?" The king answered them, "The decree is absolute, irrevocable under the Mede and Persian law." To this they replied, "Daniel, the Jewish exile, has paid no attention to you, O king, or to the decree you issued; three times a day he offers his prayer." The king was deeply grieved at this news and he made up his mind to save Daniel; he worked till sunset to rescue him. But these men insisted. They said, "Keep in mind, O king, that under the Mede and Persian law every royal prohibition or decree is irrevocable." So the king ordered Daniel to be brought and cast into the lions' den. To Daniel he said, "May your God, whom you serve so constantly, save you." To forestall any tampering, the king sealed with his own ring and the rings of the lords the stone that had been brought to block the opening of the den. Then the king returned to his palace for the night; he refused to eat and he dismissed the entertainers. Since sleep was impossible for him, the king rose very early the next morning and hastened to the lions' den. As he drew near, he cried out to Daniel sorrowfully, "O Daniel, servant of the living God, has the God whom you serve so constantly been able to save you from the lions?" Daniel answered the king: "O king, live forever! My God has sent his angel and closed the lions' mouths so that they have not hurt me. For I have been found innocent before him; neither to you have I done any harm, O king!" This gave the king great joy. At his order Daniel was removed from the den, unhurt because he trusted in his God. The king then ordered the men who had accused Daniel, along with their children and their wives, to be cast into the lions' den. Before they reached the bottom of the den, the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones. Then King Darius wrote to the nations and peoples of every language, wherever they dwell on the earth: "All peace to you! I decree that throughout my royal domain the God of Daniel is to be revered and feared: "For he is the living God, enduring forever; his Kingdom shall not be destroyed, and his dominion shall be without end. He is a deliverer and savior, working signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, and he delivered Daniel from the lions' power."

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Daniel 3:68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74

Give glory and eternal praise to him.

"Dew and rain, bless the Lord; praise and exalt him above all forever." "Frost and chill, bless the Lord; praise and exalt him above all forever."

Give glory and eternal praise to him.

"Ice and snow, bless the Lord; praise and exalt him above all forever." "Nights and days, bless the Lord; praise and exalt him above all forever."

Give glory and eternal praise to him.

"Light and darkness, bless the Lord; praise and exalt him above all forever." "Lightnings and clouds, bless the Lord; praise and exalt him above all forever."

Give glory and eternal praise to him.

“Let the earth bless the Lord, praise and exalt him above all forever.”

Give glory and eternal praise to him.

Gospel: Luke 21:20-28

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke:

Jesus said to his disciples: “When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, know that its desolation is at hand. Then those in Judea must flee to the mountains. Let those within the city escape from it, and let those in the countryside not enter the city, for these days are the time of punishment when all the Scriptures are fulfilled. Woe to pregnant women and nursing mothers in those days, for a terrible calamity will come upon the earth and a wrathful judgment upon this people. They will fall by the edge of the sword and be taken as captives to all the Gentiles; and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. “There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on earth nations will be in dismay, perplexed by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will die of fright in anticipation of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. But when these signs begin to happen, stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection for the 34th Thursday of the Year (not necessarily Thanksgiving)

God saved Daniel from the lion’s jaws and claws. He lived to have lunch as opposed to being lunch for the lion. I always have pause with biblical stories like this one. I think of the Holocaust. God saved Daniel; why just one when there were 6,000,000 to save? Did those people pray for such salvation as they stood naked and in line for the gas chamber? Exactly what does salvation mean? The Roman legions destroyed Jerusalem. The Flavian Coliseum in Rome was erected with Jerusalem’s pillaged wealth and built by its enslaved populace. You and I have faced unavoidable troubles, trials and sorrows. Some being our own doing.

Jesus was someone just like us in all but sin. There must be some perk to being God born human. For in all else, he was just like us. He was born in a barn. His crib, the manger, was an animal food trough. Manger and mangy have the same root word. To redeem and save us he had to choose to suffer and die. The night before he did so, he prayed for God to take away his fate. Even though he chose it, did he really look forward to being tortured to death? I doubt it. We call his prayer to his Father the “Agony in the Garden” not a retreat. Jesus went on to die the death of a criminal stripped naked and nailed to a tree for all to see.

The manner of how Jesus saved us may give us a clue to what salvation means. Jesus knows the meaning of suffering and its human depths. Often when faced with the cost of suffering we ask the wrong question. Why do we suffer? Who knows? I don’t always know my own motives for my behavior. How can I know God’s motives? How did Jesus find what he needed to face the cross? God heard Jesus prayer and gave Jesus what he needed to complete his mission. What is the meaning of Jesus suffering? He died for us. Now he accompanies us in our experiences.

Daniel survived his ordeal. But is Daniel alive today? God saw him through his trials, accompanied him through troubles and finally led Daniel home to God. Here we are today. God has seen us through all we've experienced until today too. We have survived to this day, by God's grace. We are alive now. One day we will not, at least on earth. Our destiny is eternal life; with Jesus and in God's eternal Kingdom. Salvation is not from pain, trials or trouble. It is salvation to eternal life and the forgiveness of our sins.

Jesus' life has shown us that the journey to the Kingdom of God is one that has a price; his life and ours. The path to glory may be gory. It may hurt too. I've had three shots of the Pfizer vaccine. Three small jabs to stimulate my immune response to COVID 19 is a smaller price, but it still stung a bit. Jesus' Passion paved the way to the Kingdom. In his suffering and death, he's near and with us all our way.

May the Lord hold us, closely, in loving arms.

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