



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

### **31st Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year A**

#### ***The Prophet Malachi***

*Readings: Malachi 1:14-2.2, 8-10, Ps 131, 1 Thessalonians 2:7, 9-13, Matthew 23: 1-12*

Hands up all those who have heard a sermon on the prophet Malachi. Brothers and sisters, all that is about to change.

Malachi is one of what are called 'The Minor Prophets' – not that they are unimportant but simply that their writings are shorter.

It is the fifth century before Christ. For the Jewish reader the canon of Scripture is coming to a close – and rather a disappointing one at that. The Messiah has not come. The remnant may be in the land but it is not the glory days they hoped for.

Certainly Israel has not come to dominate the Gentile world. Pagans have not rushed to Mount Zion to acknowledge the uniqueness of the God of Israel. The people of God have not covered themselves in glory after the exile any more than they did before. The great promises of the Covenant lie unfulfilled. The restoration hopes of the prophets, to put it kindly, seem to have been overstated. The little rump of a nation pootles along with little or no recognition of its uniqueness, its importance or its chosenness. The kingdom is not restored. The Temple is a poor relation of the Solomonic temple. The land is a fraction of God's original promise and the Covenant Law is observed more in the breach than in the reality. Any rational nation would give up on its divine pretensions and settle down for a quiet life of survival and integration with the surrounding cultural and religious

landscape. I need hardly add that such an outcome is never accepted and, even its darkest hours, the Jewish people (sometimes but a tiny remnant of them) never deny or reject their extraordinary vocation.

For the Christian reader, or Messianic Jew - for that is what we are - the writing of the Old Covenant peters out with Malachi. The prophetic charism goes into abeyance until the time of John the Baptist. The people of God have great battles with pagan enemies in the time of the Maccabees, eventually succumbing to the might of Rome and an uneasy governance so clearly spelled out in the Gospels.

What is most striking about the Old covenant texts, as we shall shortly see, is that they end still hoping but without any imminent sign of the promised redemption. What would that redemption look like? If we were to look for a fulfilment of the promises of God to His people, according to the prophets, we would have to look for several things.

- 1) That the Jewish Faith in the One true God of Israel as the only and universal God is received by the world.
- 2) That a temple would be raised where God dwells that can never be removed.
- 3) That the line of David would be restored and eternal.
- 4) That pagans would come to know God because of the teaching of the Jews.
- 5) That through the Jewish Messiah all mankind might be restored to relationship with God.
- 6) That God would pour out His spirit on all who will receive Him and make a New Covenant with His people in their hearts.

And so on... ring any bells?

All of this we now know to have happened in Jesus Christ.

No-one else has ever come close to fulfilling these criteria. They never can.

The New Testament is hidden in the Old.  
The Old Testament is fulfilled in the New.

We hear the Old Testament at Mass in order to begin to understand the glorious outworking of the long history of our salvation.

But Malachi, whose name means 'Messenger or Angel of God', is not the final word. He looks to the coming of the Messiah but he also looks forward to the Last Judgement.

Who, asks the prophet, will be able to stand in that day?

The priesthood will be purified – an end to shoddy, trivialised worship. The people of God too will be purged – no more insulting offerings to the Lord.. We are given a glimpse of the purgatorio for, we are told, it will be like a refiner's fire on silver and gold. We will be made fit for the kingdom.

The judgement will be swift on the disobedient, the false worshippers, liars, adulterers, mean masters, those who exploit widow and orphan or reject the stranger.

Malachi contrasts the impenitent with the faithful. The impenitent say, 'What's the point of this God? Why serve Him? When the arrogant do well and evildoers prosper who cares about God? Where is His justice?'

But the faithful, those who fear God, the prophet records, they will talk with one another of God's things and pass them on to their children and with whomsoever will listen. These God records in a book of remembrance, a book we will hear more of in the Apocalypse of St. John when judgement comes.

These faithful will be God's on the day when He acts in judgement. The evildoers and the unfaithful will burn up like stubble. One fire destroys the wicked another fire purifies the faithful.

And then two wonderful images...

On that day, says God, the faithful will experience the rising of the 'Sun of righteousness with healing in his wings', one of the great prophetic images

of Christ, healing the rift between God and man and overcoming sin and death.

And this to describe the joy of the faithful...

‘You shall go forth leaping like calves from the stall.’

It is a beautiful and vibrant image. All the energy and power and vitality of the young creature, so long tethered, is released in a giddy delirious bounding joy. That’s what it’s going to be like.

Two things to remember, Malachi tells us:

**KEEP GOD’S COMMANDMENTS. KEEP THE FAITH.**

The second, a promise that will run like a thread through the ministry of Jesus the Messiah and haunt New Testament commentary down the centuries.

‘God will send you Elijah the prophet before the terrible day of the Lord comes.’

That promise Jews still await.

For followers of Christ it has been realised in the ministry of the forerunner and on the Mount of Transfiguration.

The Testament closes awaiting Forerunner, awaiting Messiah, awaiting judgement, awaiting the liberation of the faithful, awaiting the destruction of evil, awaiting the preparation of hearts for God when He comes in Christ Jesus, Our Lord.

In our day we have to be, to our generation, in the places God has put us, minor prophets, bearers of the Word, messengers of God, preparers of the Way for the Lord into the hearts of men.