

Fr. Romeo Evangelista's Homily
November 17, 2019
33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)

On May 13, in the year of the Great Jubilee 2000, Pope John Paul II asked Angelo Cardinal Sodano, the Secretary of State, to announce the substance of the third part of the "secret" of Fatima, together with an interpretation. The narrative spoke of the Holy Father passing through a big city half in ruins and half trembling with halting steps; afflicted with pain and sorrow, he prayed for the souls of the corpses he met on his way; having reached the top of the mountain, on his knees at the foot of the big cross; he was killed by a group of soldiers who fired bullets and arrows at him.

After the assassination attempt on his life on May 13, 1981, it was inevitable that Pope John Paul II should see in the secret his own fate: he was very close to death. He attributed his survival to Mary. He claimed that it was a mother's hand that guided the bullets path and in his agony the Pope halted at the threshold of death.

Cardinal Ratzinger – the future Pope Benedict XVI concludes in the Theological Commentary, "this only shows that there is no immutable destiny, that faith and prayer are forces which can influence history". Commenting on the "prophecy" of Fatima, Cardinal Ratzinger explains, "It should be kept in mind that prophecy in the biblical sense does not mean to predict the future but to explain the will of God for the present, and therefore show the right path to take for the future".

These words of Cardinal Ratzinger are a helpful guide to interpreting the readings of today, especially the Gospel that is a prophetic and an apocalyptic discourse of Jesus. St. Luke is not concerned here about the "signs" of the "end of the world", but about the proper stance of Christians as they live their present reality. The persecutions of the future characterize their situation at the present. There is, therefore, a need for patient endurance, because the assurance of gaining eternal life is stronger than the test: "By your perseverance you will secure your lives".

This Sunday both Jesus and St. Paul teach us that the best way to prepare for the future is through the present moment. Some people are anxious about things to happen. Others are resigned to whatever fate has in store for them. But the Lord invites us to carve the future with our hands, with our present labors.

Ultimately our goal is heaven itself, which is the Lord's invitation for all. If we are faithful disciples, working silently with love and devotion for God and for others, we will taste the promises of the Lord. The end will still come as a surprise, for only the Father knows the day or the hour. But when it comes, we will not miss it, for we have prepared for our future with God through our faithfulness to the present moment.

Always remember the words of our Lord, "By your perseverance you will secure your lives".