

FIFTH SUNDAY OF THE GREAT FAST

Mount of the Olives Sunday

(March 26, 2006)

Bro. Vittorio Boria, ofm cap.

Readings:

1 Thes 4: 13 - 18: The Lord is coming

We do not want you to be unaware, brothers, about those who have fallen asleep, so that you may not grieve like the rest, who have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose, so too will God, through Jesus, bring with him those who have fallen asleep. 15 Indeed, we tell you this, on the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will surely not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself, with a word of command, with the voice of an archangel and with the trumpet of God, will come down from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Thus we shall always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore, console one another with these words.

2 Pet 3: 7-15: Be found without spot or blemish before him, at peace.

The present heavens and earth have been reserved by the same word for fire, kept for the day of judgment and of destruction of the godless. But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like one day. . The Lord does not delay his promise, as some regard "delay," but he is patient with you, not wishing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. . But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a mighty roar and the elements will be dissolved by fire, and the earth and everything done on it will be found out. . Since everything is to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought (you) to be, conducting yourselves in holiness and devotion, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved in flames and the elements melted by fire. . But according to his promise we await new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you await these things, be eager to be found without spot or blemish before him, at peace. And consider the patience of our Lord as salvation.

Acts 24: 1 - 22: There will be a resurrection

1 Five days later the high priest Ananias came down with some elders and an advocate, a certain Tertullus, and they presented formal charges against Paul to the governor. When he was called, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying, "Since we have attained much peace through

you, and reforms have been accomplished in this nation through your provident care, we acknowledge this in every way and everywhere, most excellent Felix, with all gratitude. But in order not to detain you further, I ask you to give us a brief hearing with your customary graciousness. We found this man to be a pest; he creates dissension among Jews all over the world and is a ringleader of the sect of the Nazoreans. He even tried to desecrate our temple, but we arrested him. If you examine him you will be able to learn from him for yourself about everything of which we are accusing him." The Jews also joined in the attack and asserted that these things were so. Then the governor motioned to him to speak and Paul replied, "I know that you have been a judge over this nation for many years and so I am pleased to make my defense before you. As you can verify, not more than twelve days have passed since I went up to Jerusalem to worship. Neither in the temple, nor in the synagogues, nor anywhere in the city did they find me arguing with anyone or instigating a riot among the people. Nor can they prove to you the accusations they are now making against me. But this I do admit to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our ancestors and I believe everything that is in accordance with the law and written in the prophets. I have the same hope in God as they themselves have that there will be a resurrection of the righteous and the unrighteous. Because of this, I always strive to keep my conscience clear before God and man. After many years, I came to bring alms for my nation and offerings. 18 While I was so engaged, they found me, after my purification, in the temple without a crowd or disturbance. But some Jews from the province of Asia, who should be here before you to make whatever accusation they might have against me-- or let these men themselves state what crime they discovered when I stood before the Sanhedrin, unless it was my one outcry as I stood among them, that 'I am on trial before you today for the resurrection of the dead.'" Then Felix, who was accurately informed about the Way, postponed the trial, saying, "When Lysias the commander comes down, I shall decide your case."

Mat 24: 1-36: No one knows the day or the hour

Jesus left the temple area and was going away, when his disciples approached him to point out the temple buildings. He said to them in reply, "You see all these things, do you not? Amen, I say to you, there will not be left here a stone upon another stone that will not be thrown down." As he was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples approached him privately and said, "Tell us, when will this happen, and what sign will there be of your coming, and of the end of the age?" Jesus said to them in reply, "See that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Messiah,' and they will deceive many. 6 You will hear of wars and

reports of wars; see that you are not alarmed, for these things must happen, but it will not yet be the end. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be famines and earthquakes from place to place. All these are the beginning of the labor pains. Then they will hand you over to persecution, and they will kill you. You will be hated by all nations because of my name. And then many will be led into sin; they will betray and hate one another.

Many false prophets will arise and deceive many; and because of the increase of evildoing, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who perseveres to the end will be saved. 14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the world as a witness to all nations, and then the end will come. 15 "When you see the desolating abomination spoken of through Daniel the prophet standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), 16 then those in Judea must flee to the mountains, 17 a person on the housetop must not go down to get things out of his house, 18 a person in the field must not return to get his cloak. 19 Woe to pregnant women and nursing mothers in those days. 20 Pray that your flight not be in winter or on the sabbath, 21 for at that time there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will be. 22 And if those days had not been shortened, no one would be saved; but for the sake of the elect they will be shortened. 23 If anyone says to you then, 'Look, here is the Messiah!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it. 24 False messiahs and false prophets will arise, and they will perform signs and wonders so great as to deceive, if that were possible, even the elect. 25 Behold, I have told it to you beforehand. 26 So if they say to you, 'He is in the desert,' do not go out there; if they say, 'He is in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. 27 For just as lightning comes from the east and is seen as far as the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be. 28 Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather. 29 "Immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming upon the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a trumpet blast, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other. "Learn a lesson from the fig tree. When its branch becomes tender and sprouts leaves, you know that summer is near. In the same way, when you see all these things, know that he is near, at the gates. Amen, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. "But of that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.

MEDITATION

The four readings of today focus on one single point: **THE DAY OF THE LORD!**

1. **St. Paul** in this letter, as he did in 1 Cor. 15, gives a Christian view of death. After the coming of Jesus death is not any more the punishment of sin, but is the passage to resurrection. **Jesus died in order to rise.** The same way, the **Christian dies in order to live forever.** In fact, says St. Paul claiming the authority of Jesus: those who are alive at the second coming of the Lord will have not any advantage on those who have already died. The dead will have to rise first and then we will meet the Lord. The ultimate goal for everybody is to be with the Lord forever. If death was the curse of Adam's sin in the Old Order, death is the passage to life in the New Order.

2. **The second reading** provides an explanation on the apparent absence of the Lord: The Lord does not delay his promise, but he is patient with you, because he does not want anyone to perish, but that all should come to penance. Once he has decide to step in, though, **"the day of the Lord will come like a thief"** Therefore, our attitude should be of "conducting ourselves in holiness and devotion, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God... be eager to be found without spot or blemish before him, at peace. And consider the patience of our Lord as salvation. "

3. **The Acts of the Apostles** reading fits in the same line with Paul's statement: **"I am on trial before you today for the resurrection of the dead."** (24: 21) This is a second time Paul experiences such a negative reaction from his audience. Already in Athens, among the "wise" philosophers he was laughed as soon as he mentioned the resurrection from the dead. Which tells us that resurrection from the dead is not a natural belief but a gift from God.

4. **The Gospel** tells of the confusion at the end of times with different and opposing theories. At the end of times the Son of man will send his angels and he will come as final judge.

The passages of today are characterized by some strong statements:

1. "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away." (Mat 24: 35)
2. We do not want you to be unaware, brothers, about those who have fallen asleep, so that you may not grieve like the rest, who have no hope. ...
3. Indeed I tell you this, on the word of the Lord, ... (1 Thes. 15)

St. Peter on his part brings the authority of Paul and his wisdom to support his statements.

This means that the message we hear today is quite clear and definitive.

1. We are all going to die one day. This is the most certain event in our life

2. No one knows the day or the hour of our death. It could be very sudden and unexpected like the surprise of a burglary to a house (e.g. because of a car accident or a casual incident), or it can happen after a long and slow old age or sickness like the passage from winter to spring announced by the budding of a fig tree. It is one of the best guarded personal mysteries in an individual life. Time is one of the greatest gifts of God to the individual. The best advice the Gospel can give is: **"STAY AWAKE!!!" "BE EAGER TO BE FOUND WITHOUT SPOT OR BLEMISH BEFORE HIM AT PEACE."** God's timing is the best way he shows his compassion and consideration in our regards.

3. We are going to be judged according to our deeds on this earth with the eternal and beatific life with Jesus. Jesus' best and deepest desire for each one of us: "he does not wish that any should perish but that all should come to repentance," so that we could live the eternal life he gained for us through his passion and death.

4. For this reason St. Peter goes as far as suggesting that we live in holiness and devotion, waiting for and hastening the coming of the **day of God.**

5. Day of God (Peter), "falling asleep in the Lord", "being with the Lord" (Paul) is one way of looking at death. Not a day of fear and terror, but of hope and one which we should eagerly expect and almost anticipate.

SUNDAY IS THE DAY OF THE LORD. So the day of our death is called our Day of the Lord, the day of our rest after a creative and eventful "WEEK" While we are in this lifelong week, let us operate as God did: "And God saw that it was good!" so that we can deserve the day of our rest.