

### 33<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

*“The days will come when there will not be left one stone upon another stone that will not be thrown down...I myself shall give you a wisdom in speaking that all your adversaries will be powerless to resist or refute...Even those closest to you will betray you...but not a hair of your head will perish, for, if you stand firm, you will win your souls.”*

Luke 21, 5-19

Betrayal is something with which we are all familiar. We've witnessed it on a grand scale in the political arena where we have seen leaders toppled unceremoniously by close “friends” and colleagues. Perhaps we've been victims of betrayal ourselves, either in our families or in our places of work. And most of us would have been guilty of little betrayals when we have failed to live faithful to our proclaimed values and commitments. Betrayal is almost as old as humanity.

That famous line from Shakespeare's Julius Caesar: *“Et tu, Brute?”* - “Even you, Brutus?” has been quoted by countless victims and witnesses of betrayal. Those familiar with Robert Bolt's *A Man for All Seasons* would know the scene in which Richard Rich is taken to task by Thomas More. More had advised Rich to become a teacher. Rich, who had higher ambitions, wormed his way into a prominent role in the King's court and ended up perjuring himself and betraying More who, when opportunity presented itself, confronted Rich with: *“You know, Rich, it profits a man nothing to give his soul for the whole world...but for Wales?”*

Talk of betrayal by family and close friends and predictions of the collapse of the great Temple in Jerusalem suggest that the message of today's gospel is a bleak one. However, it is the very opposite. Jesus is saying that even if everything around us comes tumbling down, even those people and institutions in whom and in which we put all our trust, then we will survive more or less intact provided we live with integrity and hold firmly to our values. In recent times we have witnessed the collapse of temples to commercialism and capitalism. Financial giants, which we all considered to be untouchable, have been blown away because of greedy and rapacious executives and boards who have compromised their values and forgotten what it means to behave ethically. In the process, they have betrayed the small shareholders and investors who had put their faith in them.

This is betrayal on a grand scale. It hurts all the more because it is calculated, engineered by those who show little or no concern for those who are its victims. But it happens when values are shelved and respect is ignored. Betrayal also occurs on a less spectacular scale through human weakness. It's something of which we have probably all been guilty when we've lied to save ourselves from embarrassment or failed to honour a promise when a better offer has presented itself or wavered in the face of criticism. These are little betrayals for which we need to seek forgiveness and from which we need to learn if we are to protect ourselves from greater ones.

We all know something of the history of how the Great Wall of China failed to meet the purpose for which it had been constructed. Nearly 9000 kms of wall were built over centuries to protect the Chinese heartland from northern Manchurian and Mongolian invaders. The building took many centuries though most of it was completed during the Ming Dynasty. It seems that the wall itself was never breached.

The only successful invasions occurred when generals responsible for guarding the gates succumbed to bribery or were in other ways disloyal to their rulers. The Chinese might have been great builders of walls but were less successful in building character and teaching integrity. That same challenge of fostering integrity has faced parents and teachers and leaders throughout human history, and that's the challenge that Jesus puts to each of us in today's gospel.

We are called to embrace values that will survive the crumbling of our temples to materialism and consumerism; to integrate into our lives qualities like honesty and compassion and justice which will come to the fore when setbacks topple our sureties and uncover the emptiness of some of the things which we have taken great risks to acquire.

We must not ignore the fact that we live in a world where trade and commerce and technology are of great import. However, today's gospel reminds us that the only lasting treasures are the timeless things of God: compassion, respect, friendship, generosity, justice and all those things that help to make the dream of Jesus real.