**33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time- Cycle C**Nov. 16/17, 2019Malachi 3: 19-20a; 2Thes 3: 7-12; Luke 21: 5-19

About 9 years ago, a young woman ran into her local church to tell the priest who had married her and her husband that she was going to have a baby. She asked the priest to bless her and her unborn child. He did. This perhaps was the last act of his life and hers, for moments later, a gunman stormed into the Cathedral of Our Lady of Salvation in Iraq and murdered the priest, the woman and her unborn child, and in the end, over 50 Iraqis simply because they were Catholics.

Life can be fragile. Its unfolding uncertain. Jesus says no less than two times in the Gospel today that his followers will be persecuted for believing in him, and some will be put to death. He tells us to persevere. He tells us that all sorts of attention-getting things are going to happen to us: there will be plagues and wars; there will be famines; we will be hauled into courts and made fun of because of our faith. But none of these things, as difficult as they may be, are of any lasting importance, for he will provide us with whatever words and resources we need to deal with them and he will never abandon us.

Jesus says that the uncertainties, the tragedies, the persecutions we may experience in our lives are not to be feared; rather, they are opportunities for us to “give witness” to what? To testify to our love for God and his love for us. We are not to live in fear, but simply and patiently go about each day with all it uncertainties living God’s law of love and trusting his love for us; that is what is important.

Yes, life’s unfolding is uncertain, but death’s reality is not. The uncertainties of life often overwhelm us with fear and anxiety, but the certainty of death can bring us peace when faced with faith. In both, i.e., the uncertainty of life events and the certainty of death, we have the opportunity to proclaim our faith.Jesus does not tell us how our lives will play out, nor does he tell us what hour we will die. It is not for us to know, or to decide. It is a mystery God will reveal in his own time, a time he has known for all eternity. Jesus does not tell us when the world as we know it will end. Only the Father knows.We must live with uncertainty of life and the certainty of death, and we must die in faith, adhering to Jesus Christ, baptized into his death and resurrection, and in a graced relationship with him at the moment of our deaths, so we can rise to the certainty of heaven.

Our faith teaches us that there are “Four Last Things”: death, judgment, heaven and hell.We all will die a physical death. This is our common experience.We all will experience a “particular judgment” at the moment of our death when it will be abundantly obvious to us what we have chosen for our ultimate destination based on how we have chosen to live our lives.We all will experience a “general judgment” at the end of time when Jesus returns in glory and our bodies will be reunited with our souls.But the real question is where are we headed? What will be our ultimate destination? Are we moving in the right direction? Will we be with God for all eternity in heaven, or will we be separated from him in hell? The choice is ours. We have the freedom to choose.

I must admit I can get rather anxious about when, where, and how death will come to me. Will it be by disease, accident, old age, or will I die as a martyr for the faith? But the certainty of death, or even the end of the world, does not much concern me because I believe in the presence of God, and in the resurrection to new life. I believe in life after death. I believe that Jesus Christ has conquered death; that he has made death a portal through which we must pass into eternal happiness. I believe it with all my heart and soul, and I believe it because Jesus has taught it, and I find Jesus to be credible and convincing. May God bless all of you!