

# Arrupe International Residence

Thanksgiving Mass for 25 years

Fr Mark Raper SJ, November 14, 2015

Readings of Thirty Third Sunday in Ordinary Time  
Daniel 12:1-3; Hebrews 10:11-14,18; Mark 13:24-32

*“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 these things happening, know that the Son of Man is near, at the gates. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away”*

*Mark 13:29, 30*

Today we celebrate 25 years of Arrupe International Residence, an institution dedicated to forming Jesuits for the universal mission of the Society of Jesus, a mission inspired by and integral to the vision of our former Superior General Pedro Arrupe and so rightly carrying his name. Today was Don Pedro’s own birthday. On this day 35 years ago he launched the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), some members of which are, at this very moment, together with Pope Francis, making a special dedication to the education of refugee children during the Year of Mercy. Today is also the feast of Joseph Pignatelli who for decades defended Jesuits when they themselves were refugees during the Suppression of the Society at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

We honour and remember all Arrupe alumni. We recall in a special way the life of AT Thomas, who since his days as a Jesuit scholastic was fired with a passion to serve the *Harijans* (the untouchables) of Jharkhand State. With others he set up evening schools to educate the young and fought for just land reform. AT came to Arrupe in 1995 for an MA in Sociology, returned to Hazaribag in 1997 for field research. During this visit, some landowners who oppressed the poor recognized him as the one responsible for their prosecution and imprisonment. His commitment in favour of the oppressed ones was not without opposition. In revenge, they kidnapped, tortured and beheaded him.

AT was martyred on 25 October 1997, exactly a year and a week since the death of Richie Fernando who had also lived in the Arrupe International Residence. Richie’s mother, father, sister and nephew are with us here tonight to pray and to celebrate our life at Arrupe. Richie was from Manila and entered the Society of Jesus in 1990. He was sent to Cambodia in 1995 and on 17 October 1996 died from a grenade blast in an attempt to restrain a troubled student who wished to harm a teacher. He was 26. In his Retreat Diary, Richie wrote:

*“I wish, when I die...people remember not how great, powerful, or talented I was but that I served and spoke for the truth, I gave witness to what is right, I was sincere with all my words and actions. In other words, I loved and I followed Christ.”*

When we gathered recently for the preparatory work for the next Jesuit General Congregation, the refugee movement was impacting on Europe. Our recurring reflection on the context of the forthcoming Congregation identified the rise in violence, conflicts, intolerance, and fundamentalism and consequent forced displacement of people experienced world-wide over the last five years. While in Rome I was privileged to have a few hours alone with Samour Nawras, a Syrian Jesuit coordinator of JRS Syria who had just arrived in from Damascus. His country of 20 million people has been torn apart: 4 million are refugees, 7.5 million displaced in their own country. Nawras cannot see an end to the violence in Syria inside 5 years. In recent days there have been bombings in Baghdad and Beirut and the news of the events of Paris last night are still coming in, making the scenes described in this Gospel passage tonight seem only too realistic.

The memory of the violent deaths of Fr AT Thomas and Scholastic Richie Fernando, our Arrupe alumni, bring near to us the violence that is possible in our own world. On top of this here in Asia Pacific we know first-hand of natural disasters, typhoons and tsunamis of ever increasing power to damage.

Whatever public or personal tragedy we witness or experience, there are times when we may feel the world has ended or will soon end. In this case why carry on? Why trust God's love? Why risk loving?

This Gospel speaks to us now, even though its author was writing for a Christian community suffering in another time. Theirs was the persecution by the Roman Emperor, Nero. In order to comment on the atrocities his community was facing, Mark resorted to an "underground literature" using symbols his audience understood. He was interpreting the events of his own time in light of what had occurred in earlier times. Those of us here who have lived in dictatorships know the need for this type of subterfuge when they speak or publish. Myanmar, China, Vietnam, Timor Leste, Korea during its 20 years of military dictatorship, Philippines in the time of Rizal, have all produced this type of literature. Other Biblical authors wrote in a similar way. For instance, the reading today from the Book of Daniel refers to the terrible deeds of King Nebuchadnezzar. But in fact it is a savage critique of the brutality of the Syrian tyrant Antiochus Epiphanes, invading and cruelly active when the Book of Daniel was written. In modern times, Albert Camus, did the same with his play *Caligula*. While it seemed he was writing about the insane Roman Emperor, Caligula, his French audience saw clearly that it was all about an insane Adolf Hitler.

So, rather than presenting predictions of terrible disasters for those who had gone into hiding, the Gospel author showed he understood their predicament. And then he goes on to offer a message of hope: your suffering will all be over soon, have courage and stand firm. The signs you will see in the heavens will point to an earth-shattering experience for all people: the arrival of the new kingdom of God, when peace and justice will prevail.

After describing events his readers can relate to, Mark then switches time frame. He has Jesus using the analogy of new growth on a wild fig tree to give a message to his community, and equally to us. Just as anyone can see that new growth on the fig tree is a sign that summer is coming, so we have to be alert to the signs around us of God's presence in our world and in our lives. Remain alert to the fact that God comes into our lives every single day, often in the most unlikely of

disguises: in the friendly guard, in the crabby jeepney-driver, in the sick child, in a generous neighbour, in the short-tempered bank clerk, in the homeless person we encounter on the street. Look for God's presence in the events of our lives, the big picture events, the people we meet, the changes in nature. How Ignatian is that?

Yes, God comes to us in the events of nature. *Laudato si'* reminds of who we are as planetary beings, of what we have done to our planet, and of how land and landscape are important for who we are. The wild fig and other plants and animals may be more eloquent teachers than we had ever realised.

On his last active day as General, in Bangkok on 6 August 1981 in the face of the apocalyptic scenes of refugees moving *en masse* at that time, Pedro Arrupe urged us to believe in God's presence, to be guided by his Spirit as we go to accompany, serve and defend the refugees:

*'Please, courage! I will say one thing. Don't forget it. Pray. Pray much! These problems are not solved by human efforts. I am telling you things I want to emphasise, a message, perhaps my swan-song for the Society! This is a classic case here: If we are in the frontline of a new apostolate of the Society, we have to be enlightened by the Holy Spirit. These are not pious words of a novice-master, but it is St Ignatius one hundred percent.'*

In his own life, the difficulties he faced did not dissuade him of his conviction in faith that God was constantly present in his life. In his last talk to the Fathers and Brothers at GC33 he is quoted as saying:

*"True, I have had my difficulties, both big and small, but never has God failed to stand by me. And now more than ever I find myself in the hands of this God who has taken hold of me"*

May we, as sons and daughters of Pedro Arrupe, face the realities of our world with open eyes and grow in the belief that despite, or even because of these events, the Kingdom of God is at hand. May we live lives inspired by that hope.