

Illuminations
for the 22nd Sunday
after Pentecost, November 9th

First Reading: Malachi (4:1-2a)

The short book of Malachi, the last of the twelve minor prophets, occupies the final pages of the Hebrew Bible. The prophet, whose name in Hebrew means “Messenger,” speaks of a people newly returned from exile, foretelling that the great day of the Lord is coming. In language similar in tone to the apocalyptic language of the day’s Gospel, the prophet warns that God will separate evildoers from the righteous and destroy them. But those who revere God’s name will have healing and joy, “leaping like calves from the stall.”

Psalm 98

in harmony with the prophet Malachi’s vision of God as a righteous healer, this Psalm alternative envisions God as a fair and just judge of the world and all its people. When God comes to judge the earth, the Psalmist foretells, we will sing a new song, lift up our voices, and express our joy so abundantly that even the sea, the lands, the rivers, and the hills will jump up and join the celebration. Then God’s righteousness will be known to all the nations.

Second Reading:
2nd Thessalonians 3:6-13

“Anyone unwilling to work should not eat.” This harsh judgment is too often echoed in modern times, shorn of its context. We hear it even now amid the government shutdown and loss of SNAP benefits. The original context of this letter, though – written in Paul’s name in a time of Roman persecution – insists that all the Christians in Thessalonica get up and do their share in an existential battle against an immediate challenge. Slacking would have been unfair and corrosive to a group that lived in community. But in no way does this late letter negate Jesus’s command to give food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, or any of the other ways in which we are called to show love to our neighbors.

Gospel: Luke 20:27-38

Luke wrote this scary forecast of war and destruction
for a primarily Gentile audience
some 70 years after the Crucifixion
and 30 years after the Romans
destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple.
He is telling the searing story
of an actual event – the fall of the Temple – framing it as a lesson
that Jesus taught his apostles
during the week of his passion and death. This passage follows a
series of arguments with Pharisees and Sadducees
that we have heard on recent Sundays.
It bears a truth as meaningful for us
as it was for persecuted Christians
in Luke’s own time: God is with us. Even when
we’re betrayed, scorned, hated, and hurt, “