

HOMILY FOR VIGIL SUNDAY MASS

15.11.2025, COP30 Messe

(Paróquia São José de Queluz - Av. Cipriano Santos, 311 - Canudos, Belém)

Lk 21:5–19 • Psalm 98

Cardinal Pablo Virgilio S. David

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My dear brothers and sisters, and companions in the struggle for the care of our common home:

Today’s responsorial psalm begins with a vision so breathtaking that it almost feels like a scene from a musical:

“Let the sea and what fills it resound,
the world and those who dwell in it; let the rivers clap their hands,
the mountains shout with them for joy.” (Ps 98)

You can almost hear Julie Andrews singing in the background—

“The hills are alive with the sound of music...”

Except that, this time, it is the psalmist who invites us to imagine a world so alive, so harmonious, that even rivers applaud and mountains shout for joy. What a beautiful image of integral ecology—that deep interconnectedness of all created things. When nature thrives, all creation sings; when nature suffers, the music stops.

But Jesus, in today’s Gospel, sings a different tune.

He looks at the magnificent city of Jerusalem and predicts that it will one day be reduced to rubble. Not one stone left upon another. It is a sobering reminder of what happens when human pride builds without wisdom and progress forgets its limits.

As I reflected on this, I could not help but think of our own towns and cities, what they were like before, and what they are like now. I still remember, as a young boy, traveling with my grandfather on a “casco” (a wide wooden boat with a roof made of palm leaves) to buy bangus fingerlings in Malabon and Navotas. Back then the coastal towns were still teeming with mangroves and nipa forests. Today they are mostly gone—erased by reclamation, negligence, corruption, and the relentless march of urbanization. Manila Bay is being narrowed by reclamation projects, as if the rising sea levels—fed by melting glaciers—were not already threatening to swallow our coastal towns within the next two or three decades.

I think of the endless influx of local migrants into our already overcrowded, unlivable urban poor communities.

I think of the exorbitant electricity rates in the Philippines—the highest in Asia—while we remain dependent on coal and fossil fuels.

I think of the tyranny of concrete: the overbuilt, over-cemented cities where the soil underneath can no longer breathe, absorb water, or cool itself.

And I think of the San Mateo Fault—long overdue for a magnitude 8 or 9 earthquake—and how millions of the poor remain unprepared for it.

These are not merely urban problems. They are ecological and spiritual problems.

In my reflection on the ecological cost of urbanization, I wrote that the modern metropolis, once a symbol of progress, has become the most visible sign of an unsustainable way of life.

Cities occupy only 3% of Earth's surface, but they consume over 75% of global resources and produce more than 70% of carbon emissions.

To sustain city life, we exhaust forests, mountains, rivers, seas, and rural communities far beyond the city's borders. Urbanization has created a world where the many pay the price for the comfort of the few.

And yet Jesus tells us in the Gospel: "Do not be terrified."

Disasters, wars, and upheavals will come, He says—but "the end is not yet." This is not a message of doom. It is a message of awakening.

The Gospel ends with a surprising twist:
all these adversities will become "an opportunity to bear witness."

In other words, the crises we face are not signs of God's abandonment—
they are invitations to ecological conversion,
to a new way of living on this Earth.

Here at COP 30, this is exactly what we are called to.

We stand together on the banks of the Amazon—one of the remaining lungs of the Earth—while our own island nations gasp for breath under the weight of rising seas and warming oceans.

We Filipinos know this deeply.
Every degree of ocean warming means more dead coral reefs—
which foreign tourists innocently walk on as white sand the pulverized remnants of murdered coral reefs.

Every point of warming makes typhoons stronger, wetter, deadlier. Tens of thousands of Filipino families have lost homes, livelihoods, and loved ones—and millions have migrated because the climate has become too hostile.

But the Gospel today gives us hope.

Jesus does not say the world is ending. He says we are being called to give testimony.

To speak truth.
To act with courage.
To build new models of urban living—
cities that give back more than they take,
cities that breathe again.

To defend our rivers, our mountains, our seas—
those same rivers that "clap their hands," those same mountains that "shout for joy."

And to stand in solidarity with the Indigenous Peoples here in the Amazon, and with those from our own region, whose wisdom may be the key to restoring balance in our world.

My dear friends,

We are not here at COP 30 simply to negotiate numbers.

We are here to awaken conscience.

We are here to recover the music of creation—

to let the rivers clap again,

to let the mountains sing again,

to let the seas resound with life.

Because when creation sings, humanity can breathe.

And when humanity finally listens,

the Gospel becomes Good News once more—

not of destruction,

but of renewal;

not of endings,

but of new beginnings.

May this moment be our opportunity to bear witness—

to work together for the healing of our common home,

until all creation can once again shout for joy.

Amen.