Grace and peace are yours from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, amen.

Again, in our Old Testament reading, we have an incomplete story of what God is doing with Eli and Samuel, and it takes more than just reading a chapter prior to understand the message and meaning of the text. Furthermore, this is where the unforgiveable sin is identified: blaspheming the Holy Spirit or a lack of respect for the Holy Spirit of God.

God is declaring He is passing judgement on the house of Eli because of the sins committed by his sons and Eli’s lack of discipline to them. The judgement is not unwarranted as the same judgement was passed to Aaron’s son who offered the ‘strange fire’ on the altar of the Lord. God made an example of Aarons two sons Nadab and Abihu, who were killed by God and whose offspring did not survive. Eli’s sons went much further than Aaron’s sons; they failed to prepare the offerings to God properly by cutting choice portions of the meat and selling it in the market for financial gain. Furthermore, they committed immoral acts with female workers in the temple and allow their acts to be known by the community.

Eli’s sons are not just ordinary people, they are of the priestly line who were chosen to serve God in the Tabernacle. Their father Eli is not only the High Priest in Israel, but he is also a Judge appointed by God over the people. So, for Eli’s sons to make a mockery of the Law before the altar of God becomes the means by which a sin becomes unforgiveable. God does not tell Eli the coming judgement but tells his son Samuel the wrath that is coming to Eli’s house. The sons of Eli will suffer the same fate as the sons of Aaron for their lack of respect, reverence, and fear of the Lord God.

God is watching, directing, and responding to the acts of humanity. In the context of our Scripture texts, God is moving to fulfill the prophecies for our eternal redemption and for our peace and joy here and now. In our Gospel text, the Lord Jesus is watching Nathaniel before they meet in person. A curious statement that Jesus tells Nathaniel, “I saw you under the fig tree before Phillip called you.” And here my friends come the fulfillment another blessing and mystery.

Does is matter that that Nathaniel is sitting under a tree or specifically a fig tree? Or that Jesus remarks on this? There are not coincidences in Holy Scripture and yes; it does matter. Furthermore, it is not the first time Jesus speaks these words. The Word of God through the prophet Micah who declares:

*“In days to come the mountain of the Lord’s temple shall be established as the highest of the mountains and shall be raised up above the hills.
Peoples shall stream to it, and many nations shall come and say:
“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob,
that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.”
For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.
3He shall judge between many peoples and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away;
they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war any more;
4****but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees****,
    and no one shall make them afraid, for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken.*

*For all the peoples walk, each in the name of its god, but we will walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever.”* (Micah 4:1-5)

To sit under the fig tree both literally and figuratively is to be at rest with life and our relationship with the Lord. However, in human form, in there here and now, it is still day and there is still work to be done. Just when Nathaniel finds his rest, the Lord calls him to service and says, “Follow me.” Your rest is not complete until all find rest, peace, and joy in the Word of God that remains forever.

My friends, the message here is universal not only in the image of the fig tree, but in the meaning of faithful and obedience and reverence to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit! Like the priestly line that was ordained by God Himself, we know who the Lord is, and we know God’s love for us. We know because God has changed us and given us the gift of faith that frees us to serve as we are called. And, we serve while we are still walking in the Light of Christ.

Sure, there are days when we want to call it quits and stop working, stop trying to make a difference, and stop being the bigger person. For some reason, it always appears to be easier to follow the way of the world and get ahead of others at the very expense of others. We have heard the expression; good people finish last… a line out of baseball history that lives on to transcend the game of people of baseball.

My very dear friends, stay faithful, stay hopeful, and stay active in service to the Lord. We will finish last not because we are good, we finish last because our Lord told us the first shall be last and the last shall be first. The first to receive faith and understanding will be the last because so many others need the Light that shines in our life to Lighten their lives. Jesus did not call just anyone to follow Him; He called those who were chosen to carry His Light into the world. He called those who would be strengthened for service. He called those He provided the ability to love the world!

Life is not easy! When family and friends fall victim to medical issues, health concerns, and problems they are not able to manage on their own, they need help and they need Light to shine in their darkness. They need you and me; the very people God Himself ordained to walk with others, to help carry their load, and to lean on while they walk toward their fig tree. None of us will find rest until we have fulfilled our task in bringing others into a place of rest with us.

Sure, we want the good life, we want concerns and troubles to simply fade away, we want the peace that passes understanding… and so does everyone else. We may want the image of comfort and rest the world provides with palm trees, warm weather, and paper umbrellas to protect our beverages. However, as Children of God, we know what the world offers will pass away; the palm trees will die, the weather will change, and the umbrellas will blow away leaving only an empty promise of peace.

Look to our Lord Jesus and give thanks for those in our care. We have been called to service, given the strength to succeed, and extended the peace that passes all understanding to keep our hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord. Amen.

Reference to: “Nice guys finish last.”

We’ve all heard the familiar expression “Nice guys finish last.” But most people don’t know the origin of the saying or about whom it was first said. The phrase was used by Brooklyn Dodgers manager Leo Durocher to describe former New Orleans area baseball great Mel Ott and his Giants team when the Giants were mired in last place during the 1946 season. Since then, the saying has been commonly used in non-baseball situations as well.

Ott was in his fifth season as the player-manager of the Giants in 1946. Going into a doubleheader with the Dodgers on July 4, their record was a dismal 28-40, while the Dodgers were seven games ahead of St. Louis for first place. The Dodgers had held first place since May 22.

The Giants won the first game of a twinbill at the Polo Grounds on July 4 but lost to the Dodgers in the second game, despite slamming three home runs.

Fred Stein, in his book *Mel Ott: The Little Giant of Baseball*, described a conversation the next day that led to the now-famous saying. Dodgers broadcaster Red Barber sat on the Dodgers bench before the next day’s game kidding around with Durocher. “Leo,” Barber provoked, “your guys were lucky to split yesterday the way the Giants were hitting, especially those home runs.” Durocher scoffed, “Hell, they were nothing, just cheap Polo Grounds specials.” Barber countered, “Come on Leo, be a nice guy and give credit where it’s due.” Durocher shouted back at Barber, “Nice guys! Do you know a nicer guy than Mel Ott? Or any of the other Giants? And where are they? The nice guys over there are in last place!” (https://crescentcitysports.com/leo-durocher-to-mel-ott-nice-guys-finish-last/)