

33RD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, B
UNDERSTANDING THE COMING OF CHRIST

“But as for that day and hour, nobody knows it, neither the angels of heaven nor the Son; no one but the Father” (Mk. 13: 32)

The End is Near: There is no doubt that the end is near. We are on the penultimate Sunday of the liturgical year. We have come a long way, and hopefully, the Word of God has inspired us in so many ways, given us reason to love God and our neighbours, and opened our hearts to the “joy of the gospel.” During these last weeks, the Church invites us to reflect on the “Last Things” that matter in our lives as human beings and most especially as Christians. The vision of Daniel in the First Reading (Dan. 12: 1-3) and the discourse of Jesus in the Gospel (Mk. 13: 24-32) are revealing and terrifying, yet full of hope and reassuring. But what do these mean to us? What are we expected to do?

The Day of The Lord Prophecies: Daniel speaks of “a time of great distress, unparalleled since nations first came into existence.” Jesus illustrates the post-time of distress with signs that are not comforting either: “the sun will be darkened,” “moon will lose its brightness,” “the stars will come falling from heaven,” and “the powers in the heavens will be shaken.” Taken on the surface, these are strong apocalyptic language echoing the symbols revealed to John in the Book of Revelation (Apocalypse). But the understanding here is not the same. Neither Daniel nor Jesus was strictly referring to an end time nor end of the world prophecies. Instead, as John Bergsma writes: “The thrust of the prophetic oracle of David was originally to offer hope to the people of Israel who were suffering great persecution under foreign powers, and it continued to offer hope to the Jews and Christians through many times of persecution down through the centuries.” Remember Jesus has warned disciples severally against making interpretations and calculations about the matter. In the fifth verse of the same chapter (13), Jesus says: “Take care that no one misleads you. Many will come, taking my name, and say: ‘I am he’ and they will deceive many” (Mk. 13: 6). Again, Jesus warns: “And if anyone says to you at that time: ‘Look, there is the Messiah! Look, he is there! – do not believe it’” (Mk. 13: 21). In today’s Gospel, He warns again: “But as for that day and hour, nobody knows it, neither the angels of heaven nor the Son; no one but the Father” (Mk. 13: 32). Moments before His ascension, Jesus told His disciples: “It is not for you to know the time or the moment which the Father has fixed by his authority” (Acts 1: 7). Jesus was using the images that were familiar to the Jews to communicate a concept that was common among them – the concept of the Day of the Lord, as foretold by the Old Testament prophets. For the Jews, this was the time when God would step into their affairs, overthrow all foreign oppressors, and free His people from their dominations. In this sense, Jesus, like Daniel, was giving a message of hope and restoration to His people.

The Christian Understanding: The warnings of Christ that the disciples, nay we Christians, should not invest our energies in any speculative calculations about the *Parousia* (Second Coming) because such could only lead to deceit, manipulations, and falsehood have not been adhered to over the centuries by many so-called prophets, pastors and men of God, who from time-to-time have ventured to alarm the weak that the time is near or is already here. Some scholars, philosophers, mystics, Christians, and others have interpreted the earthquakes, landslides, floods, planes crashes, fires, pestilences, and the COVID-19 pandemic as signs of the end time. For us, we know that Christ will come again. St. Bernard speaks of the three arrivals of our Lord: his earthly life, his hidden presence within us, and, finally, his coming at the end of time. We profess in the Credo that “He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead.” Jesus, Himself has told us that The Son of Man will come again triumphantly in His royal regalia to “separate the sheep from the goats” (Matt. 24; 25: 31-46; Mk. 13). The Letter to the Hebrews tells us: “it is ordained on to man to die, after that judgement” (9: 27). Therefore, we are not in doubt about the Second Coming of Christ. However, the more important thing for us from this message is in the words of the Acclamation taken from Matthew (24: 42, 44): “Stay awake and stand ready, because you do not know the time and the hour when the Son of Man is coming.”

My dear friends, the end of the liturgical year compares with the end of our lives, and the end of time when the Son of Man comes in glory. This explains why the Church chooses these Readings for us to reflect on. The Lord will return, but we do not know when. Therefore, we should not be perturbed upon hearing various prognostics that the end is near. We should not worry about the end of the world; but rather prepare ourselves daily for a holy life and a peaceful death. Let these messages challenge us to be ready; to persevere in good works, keep the light always burning; and seek holiness of life in all our thoughts, words, and deeds. May the grace of God be sufficient for us all.