

When Will It End?

We are approaching the end of the church liturgical year. Next week is Christ the King Sunday when we will proclaim and anticipate the Second Coming of Jesus, establishing the fullness of the Kingdom of God on earth. Without having been told when this will happen, it is only natural for people to ask, "When will it end and how will we know when that will be?" The underlying premise is that by knowing the 'when' we can best prepare for it, but more importantly and even arrogantly, we can influence when the end will be.

In today's Gospel reading, the disciples of Jesus were marveling at the beauty of the Temple in Jerusalem, noticing not only the enormity of the structure but also the memorials given by people to help construct the Temple. There seemed to be a permanence to the Temple which was reassuring to the Jewish people. In response, Jesus seems to be making a prediction about the Temple telling that it will be destroyed. People have taken this to mean that Jesus is referring to when the Romans destroyed the Temple in 70 A.D. in putting down a rebellion by the Jewish people. Ever since Jesus spoke these words, people have been trying to line up all the events that Jesus mentions in this "little apocalypse" with events happening in the world and try to determine when the end will be. We need to remember that Jesus did not always talk in the literal sense, although much of what He had said can be taken literally. However, when we only hear this literal understanding, we miss out on a lot of what Jesus is telling us.

In this case, Jesus is telling us not to worry about the end of times. The signs that Jesus recited have been going on ever since the creation was made. There have always been earthquakes and plagues and famines and wars and all those other things that Jesus mentions. By opening our hearing of Jesus' words, we can see that He is telling us that all things that are created have a finite life

span to them. Everything that had ever been created will, sooner or later, no longer be. Even in knowing this finiteness of things created, we cannot change the course of them. There are some things that are just too big for us to have any influence over.

What we are to do, Jesus tells us, is to stop trying to control and manage everything, that there are things that are beyond our control or even comprehension. There are things for which we cannot prepare, things in which we cannot control. There will be times when we are questioned about our faith, about what we know about Jesus. Jesus tells us not to even worry about those times. That is when we are to rely on our trust in Jesus to provide what is needed. For example, did you ever listen to politicians or any public figure when they are being interviewed? If you listen carefully, the answers that they give sound too rehearsed, too prepared and many times, they do not even answer the question asked. If and when a question does get answered, the answer sometimes sounds too rehearsed, too rote and almost too unemotional. Jesus tells us when we find ourselves in a situation when our beliefs are questioned, we are not to have a ready-made answer prepared ahead of time. We need to trust in Jesus that we will give the testimony that we need to give at that time. That is not to say that we should not be studying Scriptures, learning what they mean and growing in our faith in Jesus and God.

So, if we are not to worry about when the end will be, what is it that we should be doing? We could just sit back and wait around for the Second Coming, feeling assured that we will be taken care of in the meantime. Or, we could do what a bumper sticker from several years ago suggested, "Jesus is coming, look busy" implying that simply doing anything is sufficient to ensure our salvation. However, neither approach is appropriate. As Paul reminds us in the reading from second Thessalonians, we are to do those things that we are supposed to do

and not just sit around waiting for Jesus to come, gossiping about others, critiquing what others do while not doing anything ourselves.

Paul mentions about doing an honest day's work and if one doesn't work, then they should not get to eat. We can see how the Protestant work ethic may have evolved from this passage in the belief that one must pull one's own weight in society and one must not be a drain on others' resources. Over time, this work ethic had morphed into a type of idol for us where we must always be working and only hard work will get us ahead. But if we look at the situation in which Paul is writing this letter, we may get a bit of a different outlook. Paul was writing to a house church in Thessalonica which included a community meal after their service. Paul is not even telling us that if we don't bring a dish to the church potluck dinner then we shouldn't eat. What he is saying is that we should not automatically depend on others for what we need. If we are capable of doing something, then we should do it.

If we do what we are called and created to do, and trust that God will take care of those things which we cannot and should not control, then we demonstrate a hope in the future, for the future. We learn from Scripture, especially the apocalyptic literature, that the future will be something that we cannot imagine because it is so good. The hope that we have also comes from knowing that with every ending, there is a beginning. All of the Scripture passages that talk about the end of times also talk about what replaces this creation. But the hope that we have is not solely a hope that is rooted in our eternal life. It is a hope that speaks to our future here on this earth, in this time. This is the hope that sustained the Israelites of the Bible through cycles of promises, exile and restoration. It is the hope that sustained a people who were locked in slavery in 19th Century America that one day they will be free. It is the hope that a person who is troubled with addictions has that one day

they may be free of the grip of addiction. It is the hope that a single mom who is struggling to make ends meet has that one-day life will not be such a struggle, if not for her then for her children. In short it is the hope that gets us from day-to-day despite what life throws our way.

We hear this hope in the words of Jesus today. He tells us that because of our belief in Him as the Messiah, we will face trials and hardships, possibly even worse than those who do not believe in Him. Jesus tells us that He will be there with us; guiding us, helping us through those difficult times. We do not have to depend on our own skills or wit or thinking to overcome the trials facing us. We do not have to wait for the end of times for things to get better. We can have the hope of a new beginning each and every day.

As we approach the end of the church year, we get a glimpse, however partial it is, of what eternal life may be like. Until that time, we are reminded that life will still happen and that we need to live it. We are given the hope that even though the days may seem dark, things will be better. This is living in the promise of the resurrected Jesus.

YouTube links:

Gospel and Sermon: https://youtu.be/R_8z01DaBT8

Service: <https://youtu.be/oSmHnl3VbUM>