

33rd Sunday per Annum - C
Malachi 3:19-20a;
II Thessalonians 3:7-12;
Luke 21:5-19
Little Flower - 11/17/19

My Brothers and Sisters,

Every year, as the end of the Church year approaches, our readings focus on the end times and are often apocalyptic.

The reading from the Prophet Malachi began, *“Lo, the day is coming, blazing like an oven, when all the proud and all evildoers will be stubble, And the day that is coming will set them on fire....”* According to the commentary in the lectors’ workbook, the people of Israel would have envisioned these harsh words being directed to their enemies. On the contrary, they were addressed to Israel. In other words, the Israelites made the mistake of judging others rather than themselves. As Jesus said in the Gospels, *“Why do you notice the splinter in your brother’s eye, but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own?”* [Lk. 6:41]. In other words, these last couple of weeks in the Church year challenge us to look at our own lives rather than at the lives of others.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus begins by prophesying the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. In response to the question when this will happen and what signs will precede the end time, Jesus offers apocalyptic images: wars and insurrections, powerful earthquakes, famines, and plagues, awesome sights and mighty signs from the skies, and persecutions. However, he warns them that this will not immediately mean the end has come.

Although there are believers who believe that the end of the world and Christ’s return in glory are near because they see these signs in today’s world, we have no reason to believe that the end is near. As Jesus said elsewhere in the Gospels, *“But of that day or hour, no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father”* [Mark 13:32].

However, I do believe we are living in the end times, just not that the end is near. The truth is and has always been that we are living in the midst of a lot of chaos in the natural world and of our own making. What Jesus warns us not to do is to follow false messiahs. I would include among the false messiahs the prophets of gloom and doom both within the Church and within the world.

At the same time, we can apply these readings to our own individual lives. While we live, we must not make the mistake of the ancient Israelites, being critical of others rather than of ourselves. Several times in the Gospels Jesus warns us not to judge others and tells us that we will be judged as we judge others. Likewise, just as we do not know when Christ will return in glory, we do not know when Christ will come for us.

In today’s second reading, St. Paul talks about how we are to live in these end times, in the midst of chaos. We are called to imitate him, i.e., to live orderly lives, to work hard, to not mind the business of others, and to support ourselves, in other words, to carry on. We are called to continue to strive to become the-best-version-of-ourselves even in the midst of chaos.

My brothers and sisters, when I was growing up, we saw the apocalyptic signs Jesus used in today’s Gospel as signs of the coming end of the world. Taken literally, they are frightening signs. However, when I was studying in Rome, Christologist Fr. Jean Galot said that the point of these apocalyptic signs was to help us understand that Christ’s coming in glory will be dramatic. When he came the first time, most people did not recognize him. When he comes in glory, everyone will recognize him. Fr. Galot concluded by telling us that when Christ comes in glory, the great revelation will be that he has been with us all along.