

THE END OF THE WORLD?

In the Gospel of Mark Jesus says that “With regard to when it will end, no one knows, not the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” According to what I saw on television yesterday Jesus must be wrong. Yesterday I saw a trailer for a new movie entitled 2012. The thesis is that according to the ancient Mayan Calendar that is the year in which the world is to end. Just my luck. That’s the year I turn 65 and will be eligible to start receiving Social Security and that’s the year the world is going to end. Bummer. Paying into SS for forty years and then not living long enough to get one monthly payment. It’s just not right. And according to the film, the end is not going to be very pleasant at all. There is death and destruction and fireballs and the demolition of the Vatican and many other spiritual sites as well as the Christ of the Andes.

And then we come to Church today and we hear Jesus words recorded in the gospel: The sun will grow dark; there will be no moonlight; the stars shall fall from the sky and the powers of heaven shall be shaken. I don’t know about you but if these readings are designed to give me hope they could probably have done a better job of it.

But then there is that short sentence that Jesus speaks: “You will see the Son of Man in the clouds.” Who will see? You will see. I will see. Those who believe in Jesus Christ will see. Won’t everyone see? Well, we don’t know but there is something of a precedent. When Jesus rose from the dead not everyone saw him. Only those who believed in him, only those who loved him, only those who willingly tried to live his way were able to see him. It is ironic but true. It is precisely our faith that enables us to see. We would like to think it is the other way around. We would like to think that if we grow in our understanding and there is enough evidence then we simply begin to believe. But it doesn’t work like that. It is faith which gives true sight. We have to choose to believe—and often that is right in the face of contradictory evidence and our own experience of sin and selfishness. It is our faith that enables us love and it is love that casts out fear. There will be no fear about the end in the hearts of those who have been converted to Christ. By gift and by decision we belong to Christ and because of that we will not be afraid when He comes again.

But surely the omens will be frightening and fearful signs. Yes, but that doesn’t mean we will all be afraid. We might wonder whether there is anxiety, distress, despair, terror. Perhaps. But I have come to recognize certain things because of my faith. For a long time in my life the cross was something to be feared and shunned, even run from, avoided at all cost. It was unpleasant and

unfair and irksome and bothersome and painful. Suffering had little place in my life. But then I found that the more I tried to love, the suffering came as part of that. In this world you cannot love without experiencing suffering. And if you love greatly you will experience great suffering. But here's the thing: The suffering isn't the worst. It is just suffering. And it passes. It always passes. And the other thing I have learned is that when the shadow of the cross falls across my life, Christ is very close. Christ never abandons the cross. Christ embraces the cross always and those who are under its shadow are very close to him.

At the consecration of the Mass, when I lift high the host and then the chalice I realize that I am immediately under the crucifix suspended over the altar. Christ on the cross is near. I need the purification which the cross brings. I am not to hate the affliction nor resent or resist the purgation. It is my way into Christ. There is actually peace there. I know and believe that no matter what happens, life will rise in me again and in us again through the power of Jesus Christ.

This is not just some "feeling" I have about this. I say this because that is what I truly believe—for me and for you. I have come to believe it and now am called to witness to it. You are called to listen and to believe it yourself. Then you too will witness. It must be accepted and prayed and embraced. And our world, the world in which you and I live, need what the cross brings. We are not in this thing alone.

The prophet Daniel in the first reading today speaks of the great prince of heaven, Michael, the one who has conquered the evil one and his angels and cast them out of heaven. That Michael who is known as our Guardian and Protector has been charged with writing our names in the Book of Life. Think about that for a moment. Your name, the person you call yourself, the way you see yourself, the person you are—that name, has been written in the Book of Life. God knows you and God knows your name. And whether you have sinned or not, whether your grasp of the Lord has weakened does not matter because having your name written in the Book of Life means that the Lord has a hold of you and the Lord does not let go.

My friends, believe that. You belong to Christ. In the consecration of this Mass when I hold the host up high and then the cup of the precious Blood up high, in your own heart give Christ all of you. Hold nothing back. Give him the hearts of your loved ones especially those who are suffering or afraid or confused or distant or who have lost their faith. Give all of them to Christ in that moment. Tell him how much you love him. And when you leave Church today don't forget to look up. We have to do that from time to time—look up. And one day you will see the Son of Man—me too!