

Homily for the 1st Week of Advent, Year C (2015): 1 Thes 3:12-4:2; Lk 21: 25-28, 34-36.

In our post-Christian society, that is either indifferent to the Gospel of Jesus Christ or seeks to persecute Christians with both subtle and violent attacks, there remains an interest in many Christian ideas, morals and biblical imagery. Among the most popular in our western culture is the biblical notion of apocalypse and world-wide destruction and chaos.

One needs only to turn on the TV to see that this is true. One of the most popular television series currently on air is the post-apocalyptic thriller *The Walking Dead* which features the remnant of humanity attempting to survive in a world of flesh eating zombies. Recent Hollywood blockbusters like *World War Z* and *The Hunger Games* seek to create post-apocalyptic worlds where humanity struggles to survive after calamities, be they celestial, biological or human in origin. To watch the evening news is to see apocalyptic like images unfold on our screens. Many are now suggesting that a major

world conflict may be upon us. Pope Francis himself recently said that a sort of piecemeal World War III has begun. Nor should it not really surprise us that Our Holy Father would make such a bold statement considering that among his favourite novels is the apocalyptic Christian saga *The Lord of the World* by Fr. Robert Hugh Benson, which if you are in the market for an incredible novel about the end of the world, this is arguably, after the Book of Revelation, the greatest ever written.

Whether it is in the entertainment world or the news media, the suggestions that apocalyptic like warfare and struggles surround us lead Christians to ask “Is this the end”? Has the time come for us to see “the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory”, and that “when these things begin to take place, [we must] stand up and raise [our] heads, because [our] redemption is drawing near” (Lk 21:27-28).

Many a preacher, self-proclaimed prophet and priest have made a fool of themselves by predicting that the end of the world has come and I for one do not want to be added among their company! But we must acknowledge that the times we live in are frightening and our

world is infatuated with the idea that imminent destruction is near, whether it is in the next episode of *The Walking Dead* or as we watch the news report escalating violence in the Middle East. So is it the end?

A biblical scholar once told me that when speaking of the Second Coming of Christ, one must appreciate that the end of our world began the day Jesus stood on the top of the Mount of Olives, and in the presence of the Apostles, ascended into heaven to be seated at the Right Hand of His Father. He told them “Behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age” (Mt 28:20), meaning he has never abandoned us and that when he returns, then it is the end of this passing world and the beginning of the new heaven and new earth that the Book of Revelation tells us is the final destiny of all creation.

Every day, my friends, is one day closer to the end of all things when Christ will proclaim for all to hear “Behold, I make all things new” (Rev 21:5) ! We must all desire the glorious return of Jesus Christ and patiently endure trials and tribulations as we await his return as both saviour and judge.

When St. Paul wrote to the first Christians of Thessalonica, it was evident that these Christians were anxious to have Christ return and deliver them from the persecutions that they faced for living His Gospel. St. Paul encouraged them to turn their desire to see Christ return into motivation to live the Christian life well by loving one another and seeking to be free of sin, so that when Christ returned, none would be caught unaware or unprepared to meet The Lord!

We can learn from the first Christians how to live in a similar way. To live in consuming fear of the Second Coming of Christ or of the persecution that may come for being a disciple of Jesus will cause us to doubt the love of God and be spiritually paralyzed as we think that none of our efforts to live as Christians are good enough and that the only way to prepare for my own judgement is to hide away from this world, never bothering to invite others to believe in Christ and His Church!

Instead, we must be Christian men and women of courage and audacity, ready to face persecutions when they come, unafraid to stand

up for what we believe and confident that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ if we are genuinely striving to follow him and alert and ready for his return among us.

The ways in which we can prepare to meet The Lord are manifold, but among the most important will be the need for daily prayer. There are so many reasons why we ought to pray, but among the best reasons is that it helps us forge a lasting friendship with Christ. We must not only seek to pray in times of trial or suffering, or when we request favours of God or need affirmation that He is real and truly does care about us, but also in times of peace, prosperity and success when we can be tempted to think I am actually doing pretty well and God can concern himself with the needs of others because I will be ok on my own.

Such an attitude will never lead one to develop a life of prayer that becomes a dialogue between friends, which in turn fosters an intimacy with Christ that helps us realize we can do nothing without

him and that to be away from him for even a moment is the greatest tragedy that can befall us in this life.

It will be a life of prayer that is rooted in a friendship with Christ that can conceivably lead someone to be quite peaceful and serene when Christ returns in glory! We will witness the celestial wonder of the Son of Man appearing in the clouds for all to behold and dropping to our knees, filled with a holy fear, we will also be overcome with delight because the One we knew so intimately in this life has returned, our truest friend who is also our Lord and King is visible for all to see, and there is nothing that can break that friendship, because our salvation is near at hand and an eternity with Christ awaits.

Advent calls us to be ready for this day of days, be it the end of the world or when we die and stand before Our Lord. May we all strive to make this encounter one that will be the meeting of two beloved friends, who knew each other so completely in this life and are now ready to spend never ending days in each other's company.