

November 18, 2018

A Sunday school teacher asked his class, "If I sold my house and my car, had a big garage sale and gave all the money to the church, would that get me into heaven?" "No," the children answered. He said, "If I clean the church every day, cleaned my yard and kept everything neat and tidy, would that get me into heaven?" "No," the children said. Again the teacher asked, "If I were kind to animals and gave candy to all the children and loved my wife, would that get me into heaven?" "No," they all answered again. Well then he said, "How can I get into heaven?" One little boy says, "You gotta be dead."

We are at the end of the church year, next Sunday is the last Sunday of the church year, Christ the King so of course our readings take on an apocalyptic attitude. Apocalyptic is Greek for "pulling back the veil, making known." That's where we get revelation in Latin it's the same thing, "pulling back the veil." It means we are seeing some things that we don't normally see and of course we talk about the end times. People are so fixated on the end times of the world, sometimes they forget about their end times and about being ready for when Jesus comes.

The gospel today, Saint Mark, is starting to reach its end. Jesus and His disciples are relaxing at the Mount of Olives and Jesus knows that His time is limited, His crucifixion is going to be in a few days, so He decides to talk to the disciples. He speaks of the future events with sureness and clarity. We have to think about this, if we heard this for the first time like the apostles, there would be trembling; why is the world going to come to an end? Why is this going to happen? It's the first time they've ever heard it. He says, "Be watchful, be ready." The whole thing about apocalyptic or revelation literature, the Book of Daniel we read in the first reading, some of the things Jesus says is, it has three levels of meaning. Jesus says, "Things are going to happen, not good things." The first level he talks about is what's going to happen in 70 A.D. what did happen in 70 A.D. and that is, the Romans came in after a small revolution by the Jews, and they wiped out the city. Jerusalem did not exist for a long time. They came in and one million Jews died at the hands of the Romans. Only 30,000 were left, according to Josephus a Roman historian. Jesus was letting His disciples know, this is actual things I'm talking about, this is literally what I'm talking about. But then, He goes on and uses other language, the kind of language of destruction, the heavens falling from the sky, all these things happening that we associate with the end times. Daniel was given a vision of that and that's why Saint Michael came to him to let him know that the people of God were going to be okay through this. What was happening was, Jesus was giving us a sign that this is going to happen and to prove it's going to happen go back to what I told you the first, the destruction of Jerusalem. The second language He uses, the stars falling on us, is the covenant, the new covenant coming into play and the old covenant going away. The new covenant community, we call it the Church. He said that the final period would only end when Jesus comes again. The destruction of the temple is the same as the destruction of the old covenant.

In the letter of the Hebrews, our author is talking about the old high priests in the temple offering sacrifices, but had to keep offering them because they didn't count as forever. But the new covenant under Jesus, where He offered His life one time on the cross, one sacrifice and it endures forever for forgiveness of sins. Jesus was letting the apostles know, "We're moving into another era, another part of human history." The third meaning is, the hardships and suffering that He's talking about, is kind of a pattern of what would happen to the Church and has happened. Nobody knows the day or the hour and yet so many people in history have predicted, "He's coming on this day." What was going to happen on

Y2K? Destruction, everybody's computer was going to crash, the electrical grid was going to crash, we'd all be sitting around on those big brick phones and punching buttons and nothing would happen. Priests were going out and buying generators because the power was going to die. I was like, "You're crazy, it's just an arbitrary date." But they still went and bought them. He was saying, "Guys, you're going to suffer like Me, you're going to die like Me." Eleven of the twelve apostles were martyrs, they were killed because of Jesus and they died horrible deaths; crucified upside-down, skinned alive, all kinds of things that are wonderful to look at. He's letting us know, "Hey, this is the way of the Christian, we're not supposed to be safe and content and know how to fix all the problems in the world." And so, this happened, throughout the history of the Church. It's going to continue to spread because we live in the age of the Church, we live in the new covenant which is the Church and it will be persecuted and some parts of it will be persecuted more, to the point where they die out in that part of the world. The Church was really big in Northern Africa in the first 500 years of our existence, then it died out. Very strong in Eastern and Western Europe and now it's starting to die out and we're part of that, we are part of the Western European tradition, and so it's starting to die out here. But yet, it's been alive for decades now, and Africa again, India, the Third World, is blooming with vocations, with people. They are making new dioceses every other year in certain parts. Some parts of it's going to have problems and parts of it are going to be able to survive. Jesus is letting us know, "Hey, the world doesn't like Christians, the world does not like Catholic Christians, the world does not like us." It's because of what we teach. We teach the Truth that Jesus Christ gave us and it doesn't like us. So we have to look around and say, "Wait a minute, we're not part of this world." In the 70's and early 80's everybody kept saying; we're a pilgrim people, we're traveling through this world to the next. This is like stopping at a truck stop on a highway and then continuing the journey, moving onto another goal.

In practical terms, we look out there and we see the things that are happening and we have to realize, human beings live very short lives. The Church is over 2,000 years old, it can wait, it can see things as they really are. We live short little lives so we don't have a great grasp of history that's going to be a big part of our lives and yet if we take the time to look back we see that nothing new is happening. We see that the Church always triumphs. Russia tried to stamp it out, and Eastern Europe against Russia and guess what happened? It didn't work. Communist China is still trying to stamp it out; it's not going to work. The Church doesn't die, but every new leader says, "Maybe it will under me." But, it never does. In our country today, it's not very nice towards Catholic Christians. The battles we're fighting in courts, the battles we're fighting in organizations trying to keep our parishes running is phenomenal because of the anti-Christian sentiment. So we have to realize, this is part of what Jesus was talking about. We live in the end times. The end times started when Jesus ascended into heaven and the Holy Spirit came down at Pentecost. The end times are not some special time at the end of the world, yes, that's going to happen, but the end times are right now because this is the last age of the human race. Once this age is finished, Jesus will come and take us all back to heaven, hopefully. When we see this end time stuff, we shouldn't give it any notice, any credit, we should just move on to something else. The end time that we need to worry about is for ourselves; "Is my soul ready to die, is my soul ready to leave this world?" Some people tell me, "Oh Father, I can't wait to leave." And I ask them, "Are you ready?" "Well, I don't know." Well then you better keep living. You won't be ready until God calls you, and hopefully then. We keep living but we make sure our souls ready. The second thing we do is, with our souls being ready is sacraments; confession, communion, keeping us in tune with God. Sharing with others our faith so that they too have the same gift, the same ability to be ready, following Jesus' example. Jesus was courageous, He was gentle, patient, forgiving, humble, pure of faith, etc. We need to practice these nice

themes in our lives today because those help us stay close to God. And that's ultimately what we want because to try and stay close to God here on earth means we'll stay close to God in the afterlife when we go to heaven.

So, this whole thing about end times, should really mean, "My end times. Am I ready to die? And can I help somebody else to be ready as well?"

God bless you.