

33rd SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

St. Luke 21:5-19

The end of the world is a popular subject. People write books about it, make films about it, even base religions on it. It would seem that a person obsesses about it or ignores it completely. For those who obsess it is an exhausting exercise that often leaves the person anxious and crippled. For those who ignore it is because it is irrelevant to them.

The end of the world is not a new idea. In fact, the end of the world has been discussed since the beginning of the world. Many of the predictions of the end of the world have arisen since the time of Christ. It is reasonable to assert that some of the disciples of Our Lord expected that soon after His resurrection and ascension that He would return. St. Paul himself lived, for a time, in expectation of the imminent coming of the Lord, and acted accordingly by preaching the Gospel diligently and fervently. For these men and women their expectancy of the end times was based upon the words of Christ. As Catholics we look toward the second coming of Christ. The approaching season of Advent has a two-fold purpose. The first is commemorating the coming of God as man two-thousand years ago, and the second is preparation for the coming again of the Lord when all history and all creation will be subsumed in Him and handed over to the Father. Similarly the season of Lent has a two-fold purpose. The first is the Church's preparation for the celebration of the Lord's resurrection, and the second is the Church's preparation for the time when all men and women will be resurrected—either to eternal damnation or to eternal salvation. Within this context we properly orient our life towards its culmination, when the Lord will draw all things to Himself. It reminds us that we do not live solely for this world but rather for the world to come.

Admittedly, it is difficult to live day by day in this world with our sights set on the Kingdom of God to come. We become distracted and embroiled in daily activities, some of them of great joy, some of immense sorrow, and some of utter boredom. Somehow we must direct each of these things towards God and to see in these daily things of our life the potential for grace, whether it be by sacrifice or by charity. But how do we do that? The first is to ensure that our day is imbued with prayer; that no moment passes whereby we do not seek the help of the Lord or give gratitude to Him for blessings received. It is, as the Lord said, to “pray always.” In this way our whole day becomes a litany of short even split-second prayers but which make up a day of prayer. The second is to ensure that parts of our day, whether in the morning or the evening, or both, or at other times, that some time is given to a little more prayer. Admittedly, this can be difficult when we live a life in a constant state of activity. But it is not impossible. It may mean watching a half-hour less television a day, or reading less of a novel and more of the Bible or another spiritual book like the lives of the Saints. The third is to recognise that in each thing that we do there is a choice to be made for good or for bad, even in the most mundane things. If we are at work it may mean speaking well of a colleague rather than gossiping. If we are at the shops it may mean saying “God bless you” to a sales-person when we have been helped by them. If we are driving it may mean being patient with other drivers and praying for their safety as well as our own. If we are taking the children to school or if we are passing by a church, it may mean stepping inside for a few minutes to pray before the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle or saying a “Hail Mary” before the Blessed Virgin Mary. If we are at home with our family it may mean praying the Rosary with them, even a decade of the Rosary and signing the children with the sign of the Cross. The more difficult these things are the greater the sacrifice made and the greater the blessings we draw down upon ourself and others. In these ways we begin to orient ourself towards the Lord and to be more receptive of His grace.

Charles V was one of the great emperors of Europe. In the sixteenth century he guarded Europe from Islamic invasion by the Turkish empire, he sought to bring unity in politics and religion after the revolt of the Protestant Martin Luther. In spite of his power in the Church and in the world there seemed to be nothing he could not achieve. However, in the prime of his life, one of his closest and most well loved advisers, who had served the Emperor since his youth, fell ill. Charles was at the bedside of the man as he lay dying. He was deeply moved at the man's suffering, and wanted to comfort him. He said to the dying man, "My friend, you have been a faithful servant all these years. Please, let me now do something for you. Ask anything of me, and I will do it." The dying man turned his weak eyes to the emperor, and whispered, "Sire, there is one great favour I desire." The Emperor was glad at this, and leaned forward, "Tell me, what is it?" The man said, "Give me one more day of life—just one day more!" The emperor's face fell. He simply said, "You know that I do not have the power." The man smiled weakly, and said: "Yes, I know. Even the greatest earthly king cannot give life. And now you see how foolish I have been. I served you well all these years, but I gave no thought to my Heavenly King, and now I must go to him with empty hands. Pray for me."