

33rd Sunday of Ordinary Time.
Nov. 17 & 18, 2012

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My Dear Brothers and Sisters. When I read the Gospel for the 33rd Sunday of Ordinary Time, it was a bit of a shock. It is about the end of the world from the Gospel of St. Mark, from chapter 13. I said to myself: What can anyone say about the end of our world? We don't quite know what it means. And we certainly do not know when it is going to happen. All we know that it will come some day in the future. Can we tell anything about the future? In our natural world we tell the future either by forecast, or by projection. A forecast is a probability calculation, like the weather forecast, that is based on previous experience. Well, that does not help. We do not have a previous experience about the end of the world. What about projection? Here we look at an observable trend and provided that the trend will not change, we project a value into the future. Is there a trend here in regard to the end of the world? I don't think so. All we can see is that our universe is expanding faster and faster as time goes on. That won't do either. What else is there, then, beyond the natural world? Prophecy? We do have the words of Jesus: "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from the sky, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken".

Do we know anything about such things? Well, we do have geological records about cataclysmic events in the history of the earth. There was a total ice age at the end of the Permian in the Paleozoic, when hundreds of feet of ice covered the entire earth, and most life perished. And there was another cataclysm at the Mesozoic and Cenozoic boundary, about 62 million years ago, when a huge meteor, made mostly of iridium, hit the earth and pulverized into a fine dust cutting off the sunlight globally, and ending much of the life on earth, including that of the dinosaurs. The words "the stars will be falling from the sky" may mean just that but in a final magnitude. As to when, no one knows but only the Father.

My Sisters and Brothers, how to respond to all this? I spent eight good years in England, studying biology for four years and theology for another four years. Some of this time I spent in London. On one occasion as I was walking on a street close to Hyde Park, I saw a man in dirty clothes, messed up hair, looking nowhere with wild unseeing eyes. He carried a board in front of him and another on his back saying: "The end of the world is near!" He seemed to be frightened out of his mind. I am sure there is a much better way than that to respond to the knowledge that our world will end one day. Here is a good plan: 1. Follow Jesus' teaching. There is nothing better than that. 2. Live in God's loving and caring presence. That gives us a deep sense of security. 3. Do the best we can for the Kingdom of God in terms of love, peace, forgiveness, and caring justice. Then the end of the world will be the time of a good harvest, a positive and hopeful time. And remember, Jesus said: "When you see all this, lift up your head with confidence. Your salvation is at hand."

So my dear Sisters and Brothers, I would like to finish this brief reflection on the end of the world with the beautiful and powerful prayer that we say after the Our Father in our liturgy: Deliver us Lord, we pray, from every evil, graciously grant peace in our days, that, by the help of your mercy, we may be always free from sin, and safe from all distress, as we await with blessed hope, the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.