

You wouldn't know it by the nice weather we're having, but we are almost to Thanksgiving and to the very end of our liturgical year and of course, that means we once again hear scripture readings about the end times: the end of the world. For some folks in the room, after Tuesday night, it may seem like those days are almost upon us. If you are indeed one of those people who feel that way, I pray, that for everyone's sake, regardless of political affiliation, you are wrong.

How are we supposed to react to readings and all the talk about the end of the world? As far as the readings go, maybe we should first ask... do we tend to react to them at all anymore? When we're younger, I think they bother us more. Perhaps it's because we've heard them year after year and they don't seem any more likely to occur in our lifetime or maybe it's because we've all been desensitized by the amount of violence we see constantly in movies and television. But if we do feel like these things are possible and Jesus certainly is warning us that they are, then what should we do? Do we panic? Should we start preparing for the worst? Many people feel like we should based on the election results, that's for sure. Should we follow the advice of the "preppers"? Do you know what a "prepper" is? Someone who plans for nuclear war or the breakdown of the economy or civil society and think it's going to be so bad that they build shelters and bury caches of food and ammunition. Should we sell any stocks and securities we might have and start buying precious metals? I know some folks have been recommending that for years.

You know maybe the intent of the end times scriptures are to shock us and remind us that the end is coming for all of us eventually. It might be a dramatic communal event or it just

might be the moment each of us faces our own mortality. Regardless of which one, we should probably be prepared. So maybe it's not so crazy to prepare for the "end times".

Actually, I know a lot of very intelligent people right here in Rochester that get together on a weekly basis to prepare for those rough times ahead. I would like to introduce you to some of them right now. All you have to do is look across the room. Isn't that part of why we are here every week? To prepare ourselves... for another week? It turns out that the best way we can prepare ourselves for the end times, communal or personal, is to come together, just like we do every Sunday, to come to Christ, to come to the Church: His visible presence on earth.

"Come to me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." (MT 11:28)

Where else can you go to get yourself straightened out, where you can hear the words and have a 100% guarantee that your sins are forgiven? Where else can you literally receive the life of Christ? The sacraments give us grace which is the life of Christ through the Spirit. This grace has the power to heal us, to forgive us, to deepen our faith, to embolden us, and to draw us into the holiness that God wants for us. It transforms us to a child of God and then to an active participant in the life of Christ on earth. And if we become like Christ we have nothing to fear. Let me say that again. If we become like Christ we have nothing to fear. Do you remember what Saint John Paul II said at His inauguration as Pope? ***"Be not afraid."*** And then later... ***"There is no evil to be faced that Christ does not face with us. There is no enemy that Christ has not already conquered. There is no cross to bear that Christ has not already borne for us, and does not now bear with us."*** In other words, we're not alone.

We Christians have always flocked to our churches in times of challenge. In World War II the churches were filled on D-day and then on VE & VJ days. Back on 9/11 in 2001 we offered a service that night and hundreds came. It still happens all the time, just in an individual sense.

I try to get to daily Mass once a week usually on the same day of the week. And if one goes on a regular basis you know what you see? First of all, the regulars, God bless them. Those that can and do make a point of coming as often as they can. Then there are those that come for special remembrances like a birthday, or wedding anniversary, or the anniversary of the death of a loved one or Mass offering for them. Then there are those that come because they are going through a difficult time in their lives. It might be a medical condition, or a family or relationship issue. But they know to come to Jesus.

Last Sunday morning I was up in the arch diocese helping out a retired priest with Mass at some rural parishes. He's up there in age and has a few issues. Just before the procession was about to start a man came to us and asked if we had a pix ready for him to take to his wife. The elderly priest thought his wife was there and the man thought we should have had this all ready... it was very confusing. I think they were both kind of having a senior moment at the same time. I stepped in and promised to take care of the man's needs after Mass. So afterwards we went to the tabernacle, and I gave him a pix with a host for him to take to his wife. And I asked him about her. His face lit right up. He first told me about their life together. She was the perfect woman for him. She was the best wife and mother there ever was and now grandmother and even great grandmother, I think. How she was a school teacher in her

younger days and all the wonderful relationships they had in the community and with the families of students she taught over the years. He was so enthusiastic and grateful for all they had together. For the last seven years she has been suffering from a debilitating disease and it had progressed so she could no longer come to Mass. He explained that the doctors told him she has maybe a year left. He now he spends most of his time taking care of her and all her needs. And he doesn't regret it for a moment. He is going to prepare her for whatever comes and he will be at her side. And he knew that bringing her the Eucharist was exactly what she needed, ***no***, what they need to help them face the future. What a beautiful example of a loving spouse: witnessing and bringing Christ to the other but also, I'm sure, to everyone who knows of their situation. He knew where to come. Just as we all know where to come.

As this Jubilee year of Mercy wraps up in the next few weeks, we should remind ourselves that Jesus leaves the door to his love and mercy open for us anytime we want to come in. When we're afraid, He is there to comfort us. When we've fallen into sin, He is there to forgive us. No sin is too great. The greater the sin, the greater his mercy, for God loves us unconditionally and there is nothing we can do about it.

When we fear what's ahead or find ourselves in the middle of a maelstrom, let us remember not just the warnings that were in today's readings, but the promises as well. “... ***for you who fear my name, there will arise the sun of justice with its healing rays.***” And... “***By your perseverance you will secure your lives.***”

Let us come to the Lord and ***Be Not Afraid!***