

Thirty-third Sunday Ordinary Time B: November 14, 2021  
*He is coming... are you ready?*

Some years ago while visiting with my friend, Fr. Thomas Hennen, he remarked to me that he had been wandering around in a bookstore and was amazed to find a whole section of the store devoted to society's new fascination (or should I say fearful preoccupation) with the supposed date of 2012 which is found on the old Mayan calendar. This date allegedly purports great doom for the world – indeed, it would seem that at the end of the year 2012 all is to come to an end, at least according to some interpreters. This calendar, pagan in inspiration, could in some ways find its counterpart in the whole “end of the world” scenarios written about and discussed by some of the newer evangelical authors, eg., Messrs Tim LaHaye and Jeremy Jenkins in their *Left Behind* series. What are we Catholics to make of all of this fearful excitement about the end of the world, especially in light of today's Gospel?

To begin with, let's remember that the Gospel, in fact, all of God's Word is, as the Second Vatican Council reminded us, “inspired for the sake of our salvation”. In fact, to be even more accurate, when we as Catholics discuss any topic dealing with “revelation”, it must be kept in mind that Our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, **is** the fullness of revelation and that the revelation of Jesus is handed down to us in a two-fold manner, that is, by way of Sacred Scripture and Tradition, that is, the on-going teaching of the Apostles through the Church guided by the Holy Spirit. Understood this way, we believe and we know that the revelation of Christ given to us in Scripture and Tradition – since it is literally inspired by the Holy Spirit – is therefore inerrant, that is, incapable of error. This is literally the unshakable foundation from which any and every question we might have regarding our faith must issue forth.

Thus, to return to the question posed in the Gospel about what is normally referred to as the second coming of the Lord. Are there signs which will tell us of the approach of Jesus' second coming (often referred to as the *parousia*)? Yes! Our Lord tells us so! We just heard some of those signs in the Gospel of St. Mark:

*In those days after that tribulation the sun 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. (St. Mark 13. 24-25)*

Then Jesus goes on to remind His hearers (and that includes us!):

*Learn a lesson from the fig tree... I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away. (St. Mark 13. 28, 30)*

So... Our Lord says just as we can read and understand natural signs, we should be able to interpret from those natural signs at least some intuition of supernatural things.

But... an objection arises immediately. Our Lord spoke those words almost 2000 years ago. Does He not seem to indicate – by His own words – that everything He foretold should have happened within *that generation*? Or is there more to Christ's words than meets the eye? Note, at the end of this passage the key phrase: “*Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.*” Was Jesus mistaken in His understanding about His own return? Or is there more to the matter?

First off, let's remind ourselves of the words found in the Creed: *He will come in glory to judge the living and the dead, and His Kingdom will have no end.* These words, taken directly from the Nicene Creed are to be understood *de fide*, that is to say, as an article of the Faith which **must be believed**; not to believe this article of Faith is to place one self outside of the Faith and the Church.

What are some signs of the Second Coming of the Lord? Our Lord gives us some of those signs – besides the ones He gives to us in today's Gospel, and they are: 1) That the Gospel shall be preached throughout the World. Thus:

*This Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in the whole world, for a testimony to all nations; and then the consummation shall come. (St. Matthew 24. 14; St. Mark 13. 10)*

Did you notice that Jesus does not say that the end of the world comes *immediately* after the Gospel is preached to the whole world, that, in fact, He gives no hint of “time framework”, as it were? 2) The conversion of the Jewish people. Further understanding can be found in St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans 11. 25-32, wherein St. Paul discusses the mystery of the “fullness” or “full number” of Gentiles entering the Kingdom of God. When that “fullness” has been accomplished, then “all Israel” will be converted and saved. 3) The general apostasy or falling away from the Faith. Our Lord foretells (as well as many later saints in the Church) that near the end, many false prophets will appear leading many of the Faithful astray. St. Paul also mentions this great schism. Could we be seeing the beginning of this dreadful event in the problems of rationalism (one thing is as good as another; one religious faith is really, at bottom, the same as the other) and its unholy offspring in our Church, so-called *cafeteria Catholicism*, which means: “I believe what I want to believe and forget the rest. No one’s going to tell me what to do or believe.” 4) The appearance of the Antichrist. A great schism is connected with the Antichrist. Though he may fool many, he cannot fool everyone, most of all, he cannot fool, even by false miracles, God’s faithful. There have been many antichrists in history (precursors of the great Antichrist to come) antichrists spelled with a little “a”. Some of these were Nero, Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin: all who persecuted the Faith and hated Christ in His Faithful... but they were not the Antichrist (that is to say, Antichrist with a capital ‘A’).

These are just some of the signs, and signs which the Church teaches, that **must** be fulfilled before Our Divine Lord returns. But we are still left with the mysterious question raised at the beginning. Was Jesus incorrect in the estimation of His return?

May I point out something that we often forget – a rather obvious point raised by an old friend of mine? Jesus’ coming, which will in fact be the Second Coming, will happen to you and to me (just as it did to the people of old to whom the Lord spoke) in one of two ways. We will either be alive in this world, that is, in the flesh, at the Second Coming of the Lord. In which case, we will see all of the signs listed above played out. Or we shall experience the Second Coming in a different way, in the way that so many people already have experienced it, that is, at the moment of our personal deaths. Why do I say that?

Simply because, at the moment of our death, when my body is loosed from my soul, this also loosens my soul from space and time. If I am correct, it would seem that our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI teaches that, for most of us, our personal judgment (which occurs at the moment of death) reaches forward, as it were, to the general judgment of all the dead, which would include Our Lord’s Second Coming.

***Let me hasten to point out that this is my interpretation of a theory posited by the Holy Father; I could be mistaken in my understanding of His Holiness’ words on the one hand, and, on the other hand, this is an idea, an interpretation to better understand a mystery about which the Church has made no definitive answer. Thus, to put it in the strongest tone, this is an idea, a theory, an approach to understanding: this is not to be taken as dogma.***

On the other hand, this idea is an elegant solution to our difficulty. It is faithful to the Word of Scripture, especially in regards to the last sentence in our passage: “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.” And, as Jesus reminds us, “But of that day or hour, no one knows, neither the angels in Heaven nor the Son, but only the Father.” Amazing!

So where do we go from here? Perhaps the words of my friend, Annie Ross Fitch are the most helpful: *He – Jesus – is coming! Are you ready?*