

THE SECOND COMING (Luke 21:25-28, 34-36)

Homily given by Fr. Dennis Koliński, SJC

St. Peter's Church in Volo

29 November 2009

A newly release film, “2012”, is all about a supposed ancient Mayan prediction about the end of the world. It doesn't matter that there is no such prediction in the ancient Mayan calendar, as some claim, but people seem to have always been fascinated with apocalyptic scenarios. Jesus openly spoke about the terrifying times that would proceed His Second Coming, as we heard in today's gospel, and early Christians would often speculate about when it was going to take place.

The early Church Fathers described the End Times in vivid but terrifying imagery. They wrote about how the sun and moon would grow dark and the stars would fall from the sky like leaves in autumn. In the fourth century, St. Ephraim wrote that when the Son of Man would appear on the heavens with fire burning before him to consume the world, “mighty tempests will rise about Him, and dreadful earthquakes and lightnings such as have never before been seen, nor will be, until that day, so that the very powers of heaven will be seized with a great trembling.” Even the angels would be fearful in the face of such terrifying destruction.<sup>1</sup>

When the Lord God descended upon Mount Sinai to show the Israelites his great power and glory, to show them that He was with them, they couldn't endure the blast of the trumpets and the roar of God's voice speaking from the flaming cloud. They were so terrified that they told Moses and Aaron: “You go up to the mountain. We'll stay way back here.” So, if God showed His great majesty in order comfort the Israelites with His

presence among them, then what are we to think about that Last Day when Christ will come riding on the clouds in all of His power and glory to judge all mankind?

The end of the world and the Second Coming also occupied a very prominent place in the mind of medieval man, who had a very heightened sense of his sinfulness and the consequences of his sins. As a way of constantly reminding people of that fateful moment at the end of time, which awaits us all, a very common theme in the tympanum sculptures above the main portals of medieval cathedrals was the Last Judgment. In those portrayals, Christ the Eternal King is shown coming in glory from above on the clouds of heaven in the company of the angels and saints. At the bottom we see people rising from their graves to stand below Christ as He passes judgment on them. On His right side are the saved, gazing upward toward Christ, who are escorted into heaven by the angels. On His left side, with looks of terror on their faces, are the damned being dragged into hell by devils in the form of hideous monsters. The artists were indiscriminating in their representation of the stark reality of that day, for among both the saved and the damned were common people and kings, laymen and religious, priests, bishops and even popes.

In a certain sense, the people of the Middle Ages appreciated those frightening portrayals of the Last Judgment because it caused them to constantly ponder their mortality and eternal destiny should they not live as a Christian should. On the other hand, in today's world, such images instead tend to repulse modern man because he doesn't like to think that there might be consequences for our actions. But we should neither reject these apocalyptic visions nor become overly obsessed with them. We shouldn't act like Chicken Littles or some of the early Christians, who constantly thought

that the Last Day is around the corner. Instead, we should act like the Ninevites, who responded to Jonah's prediction of chastisement with prayers, fasting and penance.<sup>2</sup>

As frightening as this scenario of the End of the World and Judgment may be, how should we as Christians really think of it? Just as in the ancient world, many people today live in fear, not so much of the Last Judgment as of everyday life in our troubled times. But, if Christ is Risen from the dead and now lives in glory, waiting to take us to live with Him for eternity, why should we be afraid? Rather, we should feel a sense of safety and freedom from fear, for, "Christ lives, He has overcome death, He has overcome all these powers." So, we can live in the certainty of freedom and joy.<sup>3</sup> "And just as the future world in Christ has already begun, this also provides the certainty of hope. The future is not darkness in which no one can find his way. It is not like this. Without Christ, even today the world's future is dark, and fear of the future is so common. Christians know that Christ's light is stronger and therefore they live with a hope that is not vague, with a hope that gives them certainty and courage to face the future." So, as St. Paul wrote, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed for us."<sup>4</sup>

The frightening signs of the End Times in the gospel ought not to obscure the underlying message of hope because, as St. Luke records Christ's words, "when these signs begin to happen, stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand."<sup>5</sup>

Advent is a time of preparation for the commemoration of Christ's birth, the First Coming. But it is also a remote preparation for the Second Coming, for which we should be ready at all times. Every Mass, when Christ comes to us on our altars, is also a

foreshadowing of that definitive Second Coming when He will take all of those, who have been faithful to live with Him for all eternity in His heavenly kingdom.

These four weeks are, shall we say, a dress rehearsal for the Second Coming on the Last Day. Clean the house of your soul, so that He won't find that "there is no room in the inn" for Him. And especially for those of you, who have been away from the Church, we ask that you consider coming back to Her, who is your Mother. This is the time because this is a season, not only of expectation, but also a season of immense hope—hope in the divine life that Christ has prepared for **all** of us. If you've been away, perhaps this is the time to return home. If there is someone you know, who has left the Church, invite him back so that he can be here with us, his family in Christ, to welcome Him once more. This is the time to come out of the darkness of confusion, or misunderstanding, or perhaps wounded pride, to come back into the clear bright light that can come only from Christ.

Let us all pray as the early Christians: "*Maranà, thà!*, "Come, Lord Jesus!" We don't desire the end of the world, of course, but we do desire the end of divisions and the renewal of today's world, especially among all of our Catholic brethren. Come, Lord Jesus. "Come into our hearts, come and renew our lives, come into our hearts so that we ourselves may become the light of God, your presence" ... so that "Christ may truly be present in our world today and renew it."<sup>6</sup>

29 November 2009  
St. Peter's in Volo (9:30 a.m.)

Hom-Lk21,25-36,2ndComing

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<sup>1</sup> St. Ephraem, "On Penance, the Second Coming, and the Last Judgment," ) *The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers*, translated & edited by M.F. Toal, D.D., volume 1 (Ignatius Press: San Francisco, 1996), 11-12.

<sup>2</sup> Collins, Shannon M., CPM, "The Day of the Lord."  
(<http://www.ewtn.com/library/Doctrine/COLDAYOF.HTM>)

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<sup>3</sup> Benedict XVI, “On the Lord's Second Coming.”  
(<http://www.ewtn.com/library/PAPALDOC/b16stpaul12.HTM>)

<sup>4</sup> Romans 8:18.

<sup>5</sup> Luke 21:28.

<sup>6</sup> Benedict XVI, “On the Lord's Second Coming.”  
(<http://www.ewtn.com/library/PAPALDOC/b16stpaul12.HTM>)