

Peace to you, friends. Today, I have a rather startling announcement. The world is coming to an end. (No, I am not saying this because Notre Dame lost to Navy for the second time in three years). I say this because it is true. Every day, we are one day closer to the end of the world. It's just a matter of fact. So, we are getting closer and closer to the end times.

As a Church, we celebrate this fact at the end of every Church year. And our readings become more apocalyptic, they deal with the end times. Why do we do this?

Well, for one, I think that we are all fascinated by the end times. It's theme commonly found in popular culture; its found in novels such as the Left Behind series, it's found in television and movies. In fact, this week, Sony just released a movie called 2012 which deals with the whole idea of the apocalypse, the end of the world. You see, we all know that at some point in time the world as we know it will come to an end. In fact, this is one of the few beliefs that pretty much everyone on the planet shares, whether you are a theist, an atheist, we all recognize that this world will come to an end.

Similarly, no one really knows when or how that will happen. So when we combine the certain fact that the world will end with speculative reasoning as to how it will happen, you have a recipe for all sorts of entertaining ideas and notions. These ideas, naturally become portrayed in art and media.

But if we move beyond our fascination of images of great floods and massive fires, we can ask the deeper question, "what does the apocalypse mean for us, as Catholic Christians?" Certainly it must mean more than grotesque images of fire coming from the sky and historic buildings crumbling to the ground. You see, these images are really just the beginning. They're our own expressions, our own recognition that our world is indeed utterly corruptible. The problem I see in most of these pop-culture apocalyptic stories is that they never fully deal with the reality that the world as we know it is perishable.

What do I mean by that? Well, these stories do acknowledge the instability of the world, but only to a limited extent. For example, in the movies, it always seems that humanity can do something to avoid the apocalypse. They can build a bunker, or a space ship in order to avert the impending crisis. But, see, if that is the case, then apocalypse has not really been averted, it's merely been delayed. (This, by the way, leaves open the opportunity for a sequel should the world not end in 2012).

These pop-cultural apocalyptic stories all recognize that humanity needs a savior, but they tend to tell us that the savior we need is ourselves, and not God. It's always a human intervention that prevents the apocalypse from happening, right? Furthermore, life after the apocalypse is, quite simply stated, more of the same. That is, more of this life here on earth.

Well, if the next life is merely more of the same, forget about it. I don't want any part of that. More of these frail bodies that grow old and experience pain. More of the same stressful problems we experience in our daily lives. But, friends, thanks be to God, this is not what our faith promises us. Our faith tells us that the end of the world will not bring with it more of the same. Instead, scripture tells us that we "will see 'the Son of Man coming in the clouds' with great power and glory." That is to say, we will see Jesus coming in his glory to judge the living and the dead. And when the

judgment does come, the elect aren't going to be brought to safety by a spaceship, nor will they live in an underground bunker where life as we know it will go on. No, that's the utter nonsense of the movies.

What our faith teaches us, is that we will be created anew. Our faith informs us that we will live in the presence of God. We won't be idly clinging to this perishable world and all of its corruptibility. No, we will be living in a world that knows no corruption. We will have bodies that do not experience the pain and limitation of the bodies that we currently possess. Now you see, *this* is the type of post-apocalyptic life that I can get behind. A life with no hunger, no pain, no poverty, no fear...sure, sign me up for that life.

Now, here's the catch. This type of life is only made possible by a savior who is God, namely Jesus Christ. So we must put our trust in Jesus, and heed his warning that the seasons have changed. You see, Christ has enlightened us. And in doing so, He is like our fig tree, our sign that the seasons have changed. Well, if the seasons have changed, then we need to act differently, right. Nobody waits until a blizzard before buying coats, hats and gloves. No, we make these types of preparations when we sense that the season is changing from fall to winter. Well, in the same way, Jesus is warning us that we need to make the necessary preparations in our spiritual lives if we are to be prepared for the apocalypse. We are to follow his example and live as people who have been enlightened by God.

St. Paul gives us similar warning in his letter to the Thessalonians. He reminds us that we are "children of the light and children of the day. We are not of the night or of darkness. Therefore, let us not sleep as the rest do, but let us stay alert and sober."

So for us, who are Catholic Christians, who are Children of the Light, the end of the world is something for which we need to be prepared. Now, this of course, doesn't mean we go into mass hysteria like the people in the movies. No, in fact the Catechism teaches us that when we are at the Eucharist, we pray "May your grace come and this world pass away." Instead, what we need to do is transform our lives to the Truth of the Gospel. Jesus taught us a new way of living, a way of living that did not give into the fear and mass hysteria that often leads to the scapegoating of innocent victims and cyclical violence. Instead, he advocated self-giving as a way to promote peace, and forgiving others as the way to our own forgiveness.

This is the lifestyle that Jesus taught us. We live this lifestyle when we engage our Catholic faith. We live this when we follow moral teachings of our Church. We live this when we proclaim the culture of life in opposition to the culture of death that is so prevalent in our world. We live this when we participate in the liturgy and sacraments of the Church, especially the Eucharist which we will celebrate in a few moments, and the sacrament of penance, where we recognize our own failures.

If we follow this example that has been laid out before us, then we don't need to panic about the end of the world. Because we know that it will not mean utter destruction for us, but re-creation. If we are actively living our Catholic Faith, if we actively follow its precepts, if we frequently make use of the sacraments, then the notion of the apocalypse should not evoke feelings of consternation and despair, but of joy and confidence that we will see the "Son of Man" in all His glory and dwell in the house of God all the days of our lives.