

## Homily for the 33<sup>rd</sup> Sunday, Year B

### Introduction

In this world nothing is certain but death and taxes, so said Benjamin Franklin. While he may be right about the unavoidability of death and taxes, as Christians we believe that another certainty in our lives is the second coming of Christ. The reality of Christ's second coming is absolute. Jesus has one vital word, a note of caution, for every generation of believers, past, present and future. His word of caution is "Watch". I guess that is his message for us in this Mass.

### Homily

The first reading is part of the vision of the prophet Daniel concerning the end of time. It is remarkable because it contains the earliest statement of belief in the resurrection, and the first mention in the Bible of everlasting life. This text probably led to the medieval theological idea of the last judgement.

In the Gospel we have part of Mark's teaching on the end time. Mark's teaching was coloured or influenced by what was already happening in his time. There were lots of persecutions by both the Jews and the Romans. The persecutions were so ferocious and virulent that St. Mark, the writer of our Gospel thought the end of time was imminent. This belief was very common among the early Christians. He emphasized that the very time of the end is known only to God. He warned Christians to ignore claims and speculations that the end is near, instead they should maintain a steady watch and vigilance. The purpose of the Lord's coming is to gather all of us, his elect together. We share in Mark's faith, expectation, watchfulness and spirituality.

November is traditionally the month that the Church invites us to consider the last things: death, judgement, heaven, hell and the second coming. The return of Christ known technically as the 'parousia' is a vital truth of our faith and we need to reclaim it in our own lives. We need to pray for it and long for it. I have a short story to tell you:

A woman was hurrying home from work. This was her Bingo night. Suddenly, she spotted this fellow standing on the edge of a pavement holding aloft a placard which read: The end of the world is near. Out of her curiosity, she went up to him and asked: you said the end of the world is near? That's right, he retorted. But are you sure? Quite sure my dear, he answered. And you said it is near. That's right he answered again. How near is it?, the lady enquired. Oh, very near, he said. Could She impatiently asked, could you be more precise please? In a desperate voice she said again 'tell me son, is it going to take place before or after Bingo.

The world in which we live is a very uncertain one. It seems to lurch from one crisis to the other. This uncertainty can cause great fear and anxiety. In the midst of this uncertainty and anxieties that we sometimes find ourselves, we need to find something to rely on. For us Christian, the only anchor is our faith in God and absolute belief in his teachings. The psalm of today's mass puts it succinctly: 'I keep the Lord ever in my sight, since he is at my right hand, I shall stand firm'. This is all we have and of course, this is all we need. We need to constantly reassure ourselves that everything is in God's hands.

Many people have claimed to know when the world would come to an end. Some time ago in Nigeria, some Christian sects began to prophesy that the world was coming to an end and that they and their members were going to inherit all the properties that would be left by those who would

be damned. In other words, while other people who don't belong to their group would perish, they and their members would stay back and inherit the earth as their saviour had promised them. Nothing can be far from the truth. So many prophets and visionaries have gone about preaching the exact date of the end of the world. The Lord tells us today not to worry about the date or day of the end. He said clearly that only God knows when. We should not bother ourselves about the end time. Our preoccupation and business should be to do God's will and live a fulfilled life. St. Ireneaus said the glory of God is the human person fully alive. If we live happy and generative life, a generous and caring life, a life that brings joy, consolation and solace to others, we should not worry at all about the Lord's second coming. An ancient Protestant Hymn puts it perhaps more clearly: I sing, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow. And live this day as if thy last. Improve thy talent with due care, for this great day thyself prepare". If we lived as if this is our last, we would have lived with caution, giving our very best to life.

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