

The Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time November 14, 2021

In today's gospel, Jesus speaks about the end of the world and His glorious Second Coming. He tells us very plainly that no one knows when that day and hour will be except God alone. But, that hasn't kept people from trying to figure out on their own when the end of the world will take place.

One person who thought he knew when the end of the world would be was an American preacher named William Miller.

He was raised as a devout Baptist, and during one Sunday service, he was struck by a powerful sense of God's presence and was moved by the realization of how great Jesus' love must be if He was willing to give His life to save sinners. At that point, William Miller committed himself to the Christian faith.

With that, he began an intense study of the Bible trying to understand for himself what it taught. He became fascinated with prophecies about the end of the world, particularly in the Book of Daniel which we heard proclaimed in today's first reading. Through a careful study of the prophecies in that book, he calculated that the world would come to an end between March 21, 1843 and March 21, 1844. Though he came to this conclusion in 1818, he spent the next four years going over his calculations to make sure they were correct. Then, in 1822, he began to share what he had discovered with the world.

For the next few years, Miller published articles and gave lectures trying to convince people to prepare themselves for the imminent return of Jesus Christ. As many as 100,000 people began to follow him, many of whom sold all that they had so that they would be prepared for that day. However, March 21, 1844 came and went, proving that Miller was wrong about the end of the world. Miller took another look at the biblical prophecies and decided he had made a mistake and that the end of the world would be April 18, 1844. That day came and went as well.

That date came to be called "The Great Disappointment". Many of Miller's followers left Christianity all together. Others formed their own churches, some of which are still around today such as the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Seventh-Day Adventist Church.

There are those today trying to convince the world that it is going to end in the next few years if we don't change drastically what we do, how we do it, and where we do it.

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We might want to laugh at people like William Miller who think they can predict the end of the world even though Jesus taught us that no one can. Still, there is something that William Miller and people like him get right. We should be looking forward to Jesus' Second Coming. We should be living with a lively expectation that He will be returning soon. And we should be actively preparing ourselves for the end of the world and our final judgment.

Jesus makes it very clear that He will come again. This Second Coming will be very different from His First Coming. At that First Coming, He was born in Bethlehem in poverty. Only a few people were aware of it - namely, Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, and the wise men. But, when He comes again, it will be in power and glory. All people will see it. No one will be able to deny that He exists and that He has conquered sin and death. He came the first time to save sinners, and in His Second Coming, he will judge those who have refused to believe and repent.

So, we should be living with the realization that we will each have to give an account for everything we have said and done in this life. If we have done evil in the past, then we should quickly repent of it and go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. And, from now on, we should commit ourselves to loving God and our neighbor. At the end of every day, we should examine our consciences and ask ourselves if what we have said and done was pleasing to God. We shouldn't be doing this out of fear, but out of love for the God who saves us. If we truly love Him, we will want to please Him in everything we say and do. If we love Him, then we will realize that He is merciful and run to Him when we have done wrong. We should also treat others with the same mercy that God has shown us. We should be quick to forgive others and quick to reach out to those who are in need. If we have been merciful, then we can be assured that God will be merciful with us when we are judged.

Though Jesus tells us that no one knows when the end of the world will be, He does teach us that there will be signs that the end is near and that we should be aware of them. In today's gospel, He says, "Learn a lesson from the fig tree. When its branches become tender and sprout leaves, you know that summer is near. In the same way, when you see these things happening, know that he is near, at the gates."

One of those signs of the end times is that many people will abandon the faith. They will be seduced by ideologies that promise salvation in this world apart from God and His Church. To make sure that we are not deceived, we need a solid grounding in the teachings of our faith. We need to know what the Church teaches and why. Not only that, we need to put it into practice. All of us should be actively studying our faith.

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There are so many resources at our disposal - the Bible, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, and many adult faith formation programs. There has probably been no other time in the history of the world where information about the faith is available no matter what level of education we have. We should take advantage of all these resources to make sure our faith is firm, so that we can stand up to all the errors and stumbling blocks the world puts in our way.

William Miller was wrong about the end of the world. But one thing is sure, it is a lot closer now than when he predicted it over 175 years ago. Therefore, we should be preparing ourselves for Jesus' Second Coming by fervent prayer, by repenting of our sins, and by embracing our faith.