

Every year, on the 33rd Sunday of Ordinary time, we have a set of readings that are, well... extra-ordinary. This year, we hear Mark's portrayal of the end times. He mentions the trials, the omens, the shaking of the heavens, the Son of Man coming in clouds with power and glory upon the winds.

This topic, the end of time, the final judgment, the end... of...well...everything... has been a popular subject for movies, books, art, poetry and, indeed, entire religious belief systems.

This last Friday, the movie 2012 opened in the theaters. It is yet another movie about the end of the world.

Aside from being entertaining, there is also always a comfortable and somewhat predictable story line in these movies, whether it is 2012, Independence Day or even Godzilla - the human spirit will triumph, and all will be saved by the most unlikely of heroes.

Book upon book has been written in our day claiming to read the signs of the times and predicting Christ's soon, if not imminent return. The appeal of these books is that they give us a sense of control, and a sense of having a hidden knowledge about God. What they usually lack is any spiritual insight as to how to ready our souls for that day of the Lord.

And yet, if we take this Gospel too literally, the text is in danger of losing its meaning. Jesus said: "**this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place.**" How many generations have now passed?

It would seem an important thing to me to not limit this Gospel message strictly to one historical period. Like all of Scripture, it speaks to every generation, including our own.

What if the text is not so much a warning about the end of the world as it is a commentary on how we should be living in it?

If we do not know the hour of Christ's return, then isn't it conceivable that it could be this hour?

We are not accustomed to living in that thought are we?

We are planners.

- We know where we are going after Mass,
- what we will see on TV this week,
- Where we will be next Tuesday.

As Judy could tell you, I would be lost without my Blackberry telling me where I'm supposed to be during the next month.

But what Jesus is telling us that.....well.....maybe.....we might just be... someplace else.

The message today, though colorful, is not one of doom and gloom. It is actually one of great promise and hope for **"he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds"**.

However, we cannot afford to ignore that the message carries with it a warning to be prepared for that time.

How do we do that?

The most obvious to me as a Catholic is to make use of the Sacraments Christ has left the Church, especially Reconciliation and Eucharist. When we live these Sacraments, we are configured ever more closely to Christ, and we learn to welcome His return instead of living in fear of it.

The Psalmist offers us an additional insight. We are to put our trust in God, who **"is our inheritance, our portion and cup, our reason for confidence"**

Yet we are called to be *more* than trusting, even more than Sacramental.

Daniel tells us in the first reading: "**the wise** (*and I assume we want that to be us*) **shall shine brightly like the splendor of the firmament and those who lead the many to justice shall be like the stars forever.**"

We are called to lead many to **justice**. That sounds like a huge task, and in some respects it is.

But we do this by living a life of justice which means

- treating others in kindness,
- Putting away our prejudices and doing the right thing out of love for God.
- It means being active in society, always with deference for the poor... that is... anyone less fortunate than us.

Since we do not know the hour or the day, let this be the hour, let this be the day, let this be the time of our renewal.