

33rd Sun. Ord. Time (C)
St. Athanasius and St. Francis Parishes
November 12, 13, 2016

It is November. We have only one more weekend in this current Liturgical Year. After next weekend's celebration of Christ the King, we will begin Advent and a whole new season of liturgical feasts. So, it is not odd that we hear about the end of time this weekend.

There is destruction for those who are proud and do evil; they will be burned like stubble, like the refuse in a harvested field.

BUT, for those who have conducted themselves in a spirit of reverence, and lived their lives in wonder and awe of God, the light will not be one of fire and destruction, but one of warmth and healing.

We hear that the end will surely come.

BUT, we are not told when. Moreover, we hear that it may not be soon.

We hear about trials and tribulations, persecutions, and even family upheavals.

BUT, again we are not told the exact form these will take, nor which of these indicate the real end of the world.

We hear how we will be expected to give an account of our lives.

BUT AGAIN, the Scriptures are not clear about when will it be at the end of my own individual life, or will it be only at the end of the world itself?

This is unsettling for many people. Most of us don't like to live with such uncertainty. "If I only knew" we say or think to ourselves. Personally, I take these Scriptures quite seriously ... of my 5 uncles on the Wilgenbusch side, 4 died instantly ... while working, while sitting in a recliner in the front room (my dad), while riding in the back seat of a car, while at the dinner table on Christmas. The other side of the family provides at least some hope of a little warning.

Maybe we can be consoled some when we also hear in today's Scriptures that 'not a hair on the heads of the faithful will be harmed' and that 'patient endurance will save our lives'.

All of this gets wrapped up with the personal example of St. Paul in today's second Scripture: Paul labored for his people to the point of exhaustion, both day and night. Paul lived his life keenly aware of the coming of the end of time, and he witnessed to this by his own endurance.

How and when are not the best questions to ask regarding our relationship with the end of time, or at least with the end of time for me personally. It is better to ask, "how do I

want to be known when that time does come, or what do I want to be found doing when that time comes for me?

Last weekend I led some Knights of Columbus men on a retreat. I was very impressed with the session on Sunday morning. On Saturday I had given the men 5 Scripture passages to read. Over night they were to take one of the passages and ask themselves these questions: where am I in this passage, what in the passage is a challenge to me, and what phrase/line in the passage sticks with me. On Sunday morning the sharing was personal and reflective. They seemed like men who at almost any time would be ready to meet the Lord.

Now an example from way back when ... you may remember a Terry Anderson, who was held captive in Iran for about 7 years. There was much publicity about him when he was freed in 1992. Terry was a Catholic, but had been on a long sabbatical with his faith. Not long before his capture in 1985, he was beginning to return to the practice of his Catholic faith. During his hostage time, he was happy to find that the person in the cell next to him was a Catholic priest. He asked the guard to let him make his confession to the priest. He reports that the priest, Fr. Jenco, made it easy for him to come back a process he thought in his personal circumstances and history would be difficult. One reporter asked Terry "so what does God expect from you now?" Terry responded:

"To be simple, even simplistic, God wants me to be a good and decent man. The specific things he wants of me are pretty simple – they are laid out in the Bible in fairly specific terms. But they are not easy, as we all know. It is not a recipe for an easy life. There's no way anyone is going to live up to it, not anyone I know anyway. What he wants is that I try, that I not be discouraged when I fail and that I not allow failure to keep me from trying again."

What you and I need to do is remain open to the quest for God. Don't be a drop-out from the quest ... paying little or no attention to God, feeling you have paid enough attention to God in your earlier years, or that you will get to it when you have more time. No relationship with anyone, particularly a relationship with God, will survive under such conditions. We must be people who continue to search, people who are resolved to remain open and to grow in God's life.

We cannot know, and we do not need to know, when, where, and how it will all end. It is enough for us to know that for those who endure patiently a lifetime search for God and who endure in our journey in faith, not a hair on our heads will be harmed, and that the warmth and healing of the Son of Justice will be ours. Again, the lesson and the question is: what do I want to be doing when the end does happen?

And oh! Friday of this week THE LIGHT IS ON until 10:00 p.m. at night.