

[Readings: Dan. 12:1-3; Ps.16; Heb.10:11-14, 18; Mark 13:24-32]

Some of the bumper stickers and rear windshields we see on the road are inappropriate and even obscene. There are two bumper stickers I saw which address today's theme of the Day of the Lord's Second Coming at the end of time and the General Judgment of humanity. It simply says, "Jesus is coming! Look busy!" Another sticker says, "Jesus is coming, and BOY is He ticked off!"

Divine Judgment is real. Our Catholic faith tells us this in the Profession of Faith we proclaim every Sunday: "He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead." "We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come." We call it Heaven. But there is also a state of existence called Hell. I believe that we have had a taste of both here on earth.

When we are at absolute peace with God in our hearts, when we experience the love, the joy and the laughter of each other, when we sacrifice and give of ourselves so much that it hurts, when our pets love us unconditionally and our friends are there for us, this is only a taste of what Heaven is like.

But when we experience hate, abuse, abandonment and alienation; when we are misunderstood, rejected and shunned by others whom we trusted and loved and thought loved us; when our hearts ache following the death of a child, a spouse, a parent, a dear friend; when we do not seem to have any purpose in life, and all life seems to be one great empty waste; when there is no hope, no health, no income, and no one around who loves us, this is a taste of Hell. Somewhere in between is Purgatory, a place and state of cleansing to get us ready to meet God face to face.

Now take both experiences of Heaven and Hell on earth, and multiply it by eternity, by infinity. Put God into this equation and we can conclude that one day we will be either eternally happy or eternally full of the unending pain of the anxiety of separation from God. Spoiler alert! The choice is not God's. The judgment is not God's. The choice is ours. And we bring judgment upon ourselves. This too can be Heaven or Hell.

Jesus speaks of the great tribulation in today's Gospel, but believe it or not, this is not a gloom and doom prophecy. It is a message of hope. Jesus calls these apocalyptic, end-of-the-world special effects the "beginning of the birth pangs." All of creation will just be going into labor.

It is time for the Great Birth to take place. This is the moment of the Resurrection of the Dead.

This is what Catholic theology calls the Day of Judgment.

A whole series of books was written based on the prediction of Jesus Christ saying in the Gospel of Luke that, "one will be taken, the other will be left behind." The series inspired the fictional "Left Behind" series. These books imply that the souls of the just will be taken from earth in the middle of its earthly existence, with the poor lost souls battling Satan for power here on earth.

I imagine myself standing next to someone who I care about deeply, who is suddenly and unexpectedly pulled up into Heaven, leaving me behind. I look up to Heaven and say, "Aw, Man..."

But Jesus is speaking of the last days. The "Rapture" as some call it, again, with no actual basis in Scripture, will not happen as they think in earth time, but at the end of time. When Jesus returns, and get this -- time and space are over. There will be no more time or space. So when the Lord comes at the end of time, you might call it our Second Birthday, or the Day of Our Rebirth. Jesus says in the Gospel of John when He tells His disciples "I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you (John 16:21-22)."

Everything financial and material that we attach ourselves to so dearly in this world is moving in the natural direction of its mortal limits. Finances and material goods will be destroyed. If we believe that there's more to life than this life, then we need to give attention to that world beyond this world. The fig tree's lesson is so simple, perhaps it takes a child to understand it.

Famous secular prophets and political pundits have predicted that when we engage in World War III, it will begin with unrest in the Middle East. Look around us and around the world to see if that is not in fact happening now.

So far, the Doomsday prophets predicted the end of the world three times. Remember Y2K? Everything was going to ruin on January 1, 2000. Here we are twenty-three years later. The next time would be October, 2011.

Three years ago, the latest false prediction was December 8th. So, I told people to get their affairs in order! I've had my affairs in order for quite a while now. On December 9 of 2021, when Armageddon didn't happen, I went out and had a big breakfast!

Make no mistake. God's Word tells us that the human community -- nations and kingdoms -- will break down. Check. Already happening. Then the earth will stop yielding food and begin to shake apart. Check. Global warming, whether you believe it or not. Next, the family will be torn apart from within. Check. That's already been happening for 60 years! Then the last faithful individuals will be persecuted. Check. Look at what our government is doing to us Catholics and Christian believers. There were more executions of Christians and Catholics in the 20th Century than in all the prior 19 Centuries combined!

Finally, the Temple will be desecrated, and the earth will be emptied of God's presence. Check. There have been 2,400 attacks on Christian and Catholic Churches in Europe alone. That doesn't count the 400 attacks on our Catholic Churches here in the United States. For now, sacrileges and desecrations abound in our Church. But God is still with His people!

When Jesus says, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place, He means it WILL take place -- the day that you and I will die, the day that you and I will breathe our last natural breath. Reading the Signs of the Times may lead us to think that the return of the Lord is imminent, near, at hand. In one way that should scare us, but only if we are not ready and prepared to meet Him.

The last few people I have given the Last Rites to inspire me with their readiness to meet the Lord. Three months ago, I heard the best comment yet, from an elderly woman, after I gave her Viaticum -- the Sacrament that literally means, "Going with you." She thanked me and then said, "I'm ready... Let's roll!" These were the final words of the heroic plane passengers who went down in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, trying to thwart the terrorists who took over their plane. Are YOU "ready to roll?" AMEN!