

## St Pius & St Anthony Homily 33<sup>rd</sup> Sunday Ordinary Year B2

How does that Progressive commercial go about being aware of one's surroundings and picking up cues from the environment? After intentionally observing an awkward silence, the doorbell rings and it's a band wanting to come in & play some dance music (NSYNC) and the guy tells them "Not now please, read the room". He wants them to size up the situation and respond in kind. I like that phrase, "Read the room". Well, Jesus is asking us in the gospel to 'Read the World'. He wants us to know the signs around us, and sense what needs to be done. Our gospel today has Jesus talking about different 'End of the World' signs. I think He is telling us Christians, "I don't want you late for the Apocalypse!" Watch the signs and Be There, Be Ready! It reminds me once of when I was a kid and my brother and I were making the holyday mass at Lourdes parish in Owensboro. I've noticed over the past 30 years that vigil/evening masses seem to have gotten earlier and earlier (they used to all be at 6:00 or even 7:00 pm at night—maybe we all go to bed earlier now, than back then). But after school that day, my brother and I did our normal work around house like always, and I think we even ate, and then we headed out to the **7:00 pm holy day mass**. As typical kids we usually ran right up to the time (not early), and maybe walked in during the opening song if it was just the two of us, so it was not a surprise to find several other cars in the lot. That night we slipped in, genuflecting into the pew and everyone was all kneeling in prayer and it was eerily quiet. And then Father appeared and said "Let us pray...." I thought 'This is different'. Well, turned out mass was ending (we were an hour late). So great, we just missed mass and weren't even trying to. But I liked that right after the final blessing (we at least got that!) as closing song ended, and we turned to walk out of this shortest mass possible, a man and his wife said to us "We are glad we weren't the only ones, we were just ahead of you!" We stuck around to talk to the associate pastor Fr Pete Hughes (he served as pastor in Murray back in the early 90's), I guess seeking absolution. He laughed at us and said "It was in the bulletin, but at least made the effort!" Such an experience and today's readings make me wonder, "**What happens if we show up to the Apocalypse an hour late?**" Jesus doesn't want us to try it, so, He tells everyone today, "Read the room-read the world. Learn the lesson of the fig tree!" But what does that mean? He doesn't spell it out completely, but wants us to size it up. Maybe the lesson is that if you bend a twig and it breaks, its dead-no growth coming from it, but if you bend it and gives with

you-there's life in it. I've been trying to grow a fig tree in front of the rectory, and I do get this lesson: that if its leaves are green but have black curled up tips, then it has been frost bitten-like last week! So I count on it going dormant now. So in today's reading, Jesus is saying, 'Read the signs and be expectant-ready'.

But really, what are the signs Jesus may want us to read? Maybe we've already seen them. 1) Sun darkening, 2) heavenly powers shaking, 3) stars falling. Does this sound familiar? What if this has already happened? How about the Sun not shining? Well at Jesus' death, what do we see? 1) Matt 27:45 "From noon onward, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon." Or the 2) Heavenly powers shaking, Matt 27: 51 "the veil of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth quaked, rocks were split," or even the 3) Falling stars –What or who might that be? How about, Judas betraying Jesus (in Matt 26:14) , Peter denying Him (in Matt 26:70, 72, 74) , and all of the apostles scattering from him (in Matt 26:56). These apostles are supposed to be 'children of light--stars?' So, if it has already happened, these signs already been shown, then are we showing up late? No, not, if we are responding now. And this is where I find great redemption in today's gospel. Jesus is telling us 'be ready now' It could just as well be at this moment. Right now-are we alert-awake to it? I like to point out how Jesus uses hopeful and uplifting examples of what follows such apocalyptic signs. We all might need to reevaluate how we look at the end times. So often people take it all, as ominous and dreaded. I wonder how Jesus feels about the typical dread, disgust and fear expressed about His 2nd coming. Like, "Is that what you think of me?" What would I feel like if after announcing 'Okay, I'm be right back' people expressed such dread and angst over it. I'd be sad over that. Reminds me of the old putdown, when someone leaves the scene saying, 'See you later' and the next person jokes, 'Oh thanks for the warning!'- So, I think Jesus actually desires excitement, joy and an attitude of 'Yes come on' among us. The end of world (His 2<sup>nd</sup> coming) is not to be dreaded, but actually celebrated. I emphasize His very optimistic and forward looking, hopeful examples. First, in verse 27 He said, 'Son of Man, will send out the angels and gather His elect from the four winds-end of earth to end of sky....' Jesus is not going to miss us- we might be late or miss Him, but He is not going to miss His own! What a comfort. And then He gives the image of the budding tree, this lesson of the fig tree. He says, "When the bud swells, when the branch is tender, new life is birthing." That means growth is coming forth, blooming is near for us, not dooming. Jesus is life and resurrection. He could have used another more gloomily foreboding example,

such as talking about a branch decaying , rotting, being eaten away or broken off and burned. But He doesn't. He talks about new life coming back. That is good news: a tender shoot opening and releasing new leaves. These new leaves are the softest to unfurl & unfold like glory. None of this is to be feared or be a cause of panic, according to Jesus. Absolutely not. It can actually be a welcome sign of greater things breaking in on us. The end of the world as we know it is not to be feared or dreaded if we are with Jesus 'reading the signs. If we read Him, if we read the room of this world, then it is time, and always time! We should be comforted and confident, faithfully saying, 'Come Lord Jesus!' I love how that was a frequent refrain in the early church (find it in Rev 22:20 & 1 Corinthians 16:22) They were excited about it! They frequently said it to one another as an optimistic pep-prayer to each other, as a way of saying, 'Be ready, waiting and on time.' For yes, it could be now!