

OCTOBER 21 MSGR. NUSCA

In today's Gospel we find Our Lord teaching His disciples as they journey to Jerusalem. And in light of the mystery of His return in judgment at the end of time, Our Lord's teachings here are aimed at helping the disciples to be truly wise on their journey through this passing world. His words encourage us to strive to appreciate and to discern the difference between earthly riches and heavenly rewards.

For as the author of the Letter to the Hebrews observes, we have here "*no lasting city*" 13:14. Our passage through this world is a difficult journey along a narrow path between two worlds: the everyday world that is passing away, and the everlasting city, the New Jerusalem whose light has already dawned upon the horizon through the life of faith and the Spirit. Our Lord's teachings invite us in a real sense to stand together as a faith community at the "threshold of a new world" and to make every effort to become even now a new creation in Christ. **And several things emerge for our reflection.**

First of all, when we consider the mystery of the return of Christ at the end of time, admittedly, it is a topic that is never too far from sight in Christian thought. It is the subject of serious reflection from the earliest years of Christianity, as we see in the very first Christian writing, St. Paul's 1st Letter to the Thessalonians written about 49-50 AD. In our own time, wars and rumors of war, have led many to engage in speculations concerning the end of the world. *Some focus on terrifying visions of divine judgment, others of the three days of darkness, and so forth.*

As Catholics we don't believe in any blueprint concerning the final days. Our understanding of the **return of Christ** is rather nuanced. Yes, Our Lord will return at the end of time, but we encounter Him **every day** through the life of faith: in the life of

prayer; the sacraments of the Church; in the Word of God and especially in the Eucharist where He is really and truly present. We encounter Him in the voices of the poor and suffering.

Is Jesus returning soon? He returns every day **where two or more are gathered in His Name**. Is it really the end of the world? Here we could consider paragraph 670 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: “*Since the Ascension God’s plan has entered into its fulfillment. We are already at “the last hour,”*” quoting the First Letter of **John 2:18**. So it is that we have been living in this “final hour” for some two-thousand years now. Even if it were the case that the end is at hand, in Luke’s Gospel 21:29, Jesus states clearly that: “*when these things begin to happen stand up, and raise your heads for your salvation draws near.*”

Jesus encourages us to live out our lives in the **light of His return in glory** rather than in the shadow of any apocalypse; and always to remain confident in God’s power to renew all things no matter what happens. I think that this is important, because of the real danger that fear, sadness, a lack of hope in the future, all risk distracting us from focusing upon God’s ongoing presence in our lives. And at the same time, they shift our focus away from the demands of the present and the **work** of the Gospel.

Many of you will be familiar with the writings of renowned British author C.S. Lewis. He suggests that rather than focusing too much on the future, God ‘wants us to attend chiefly to two things: to eternity itself, and to the Present time.’ God wants us to ponder **eternity**; to contemplate everlasting life with Him, and with the Saints, Our Lady, with St. Michael and the Angels. Or God would have us **ponder the present moment**. He adds: “*For the Present is the point at which time touches eternity.*” In the present alone ‘are *freedom and reality* offered to us.’

And so, rather than engaging in speculations concerning the future, Lewis writes that God would rather that we: ‘obey the present voice of conscience, bear our present cross; receive the present grace that God is giving us; and give thanks for the things that are going well in our lives.

Rather than constructing **timetables** concerning the end of the world, and living in the shadow of Christ’s return at the end of time, today’s Gospel invites us to focus upon the mystery of the arrival of God’s Kingdom. To remain focused always upon the *person* of Christ – upon His glorious face – and upon the daily *demands of discipleship*.

And so, I think that it is important to appreciate that our understanding of the return of Christ is not without its complexity. For again, “yes,” Our Lord will return at the end of time, but He is always at work in history (as Lord of Time); in nature (as Lord of the Cosmos); in revelation (as the Word made flesh) - in Sacred Scripture where we encounter His living voice. Christ is present in our hearts every day as the voice of conscience.

We encounter Him in prayer- public and private, especially in the Eucharist. And so, again, the Christ who will return upon the clouds at the end of time as Lord, judge and savior, is always with so many ways in our daily life. Again, including in the voices of the poor and suffering.

And so, Luke’s Gospel serves to remind us that it is precisely **our attitude toward Christ- in the present-** that is so important for our encounter with Him in judgement at the end of time. It is in *this* context- we could say, in the context of the ongoing **presences** of Christ in our lives as Christians, that Our Lord’s words in today’s Gospel should be heard. “Be dressed for action. Have your lamps lit. Be ready like those waiting for

their master to return from the wedding banquet so that they may open the door when he knocks.”

Should disaster strike, we are always in the hands of God’s divine providence. Elsewhere in the Gospel Jesus and the disciples are in a boat at sea. And although Jesus is asleep in the midst of a great storm, He calms the turbulent waters once the disciples call out to Him. And so, no matter what happens- Our Lord calls us to bring the proclamation of the Good News of salvation to the ends of the earth. Comfort the sick, console those who mourn, proclaim God’s liberty to captives, and so on. For in addition to a spirit of watchfulness, St. Augustine reminds us that to have our lamps lit means: **“to shine and glow with good works.”**

Finally, I think it is important to try and appreciate Our Lord’s call to a spirit of watchfulness. In the 1st Letter of Peter, the Apostle writes: *“Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”* Here, St. Basil the Great asks: “What is the mark of a Christian? It is to watch daily and hourly and to stand prepared in that state of total responsiveness pleasing to God, knowing that the Lord will come at an hour that he does not expect.” *Morals 22* And so the great importance of keeping watch over our *inward* thoughts; to keep constant guard over the inclinations of the heart; to keep watch over the intellect and inner spiritual processes. Closely linked with all of these ideas are the virtues of purity of heart and interior stillness as we maintain our focus on God.

As we continue to celebrate this Mass, let us pray for the grace to live our lives in a prayerful spirit of **watchfulness**, and **faithfulness** to the Gospel and all of its concrete demands. Let us pray for the grace to give witness to the Gospel even in the face of persecution and to do so without giving in to fear and

anxiety. For as St. Teresa of Calcutta reminds us: “We are all God’s children so it is important to share His gifts. Do not worry about why problems exist in the world – just respond to people’s needs...*We feel what we are doing is just a drop in the ocean, but that ocean would be less without that drop.*” In this way we can live out our lives *in the light of, and not in the shadow of the end of the world.* And nowhere is the light of Christ brighter than in the Eucharist we are celebrating.