

OCTOBER 25 2024 CARDINAL COLLINS

Today we have a reading from the 12th chapter of the gospel of Luke, and it calls us to reflect upon the present time, or what we sometimes say, "the signs of the times." There are various things which the Lord calls upon. People know that when there are indications it's going to rain, they know it's going to rain—they can read that. That's important, okay. And they know when there are signs it's going to be hot, they can read that. But they do not know how to interpret the present time.

"You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?" How do you not know how to read what we sometimes call the signs of the times? That's a good question. And the Lord calls upon us to think deeply and recognize what's actually happening, what is important in our present situation. He says you have to be able to do that if you're being hauled off to court. You'd better read it correctly and understand what's the wisest, the best course of action. What is really happening? There's no future in living in illusion. We have to, in our mere earthly things, judge wisely, interpret correctly, and understand what's going on.

Now, there is a misguided interpretation of interpreting the signs of the times, which sort of flourished for a while. It fizzed around and then it sort of evaporated a bit. But sometimes it's still there. The idea is the signs of the times—what's happening in our society—so we gotta run, run, run as Christians. Run after the signs of the times, they go here, they go there, they go everywhere. What are people doing? We gotta do that too, that's the signs of the times. What's popular today? Oh, we gotta find out what the signs of the times are. We gotta follow that, do this, do that. That's insane. There's no future in that. We don't go chasing after things like that. That's not what the Lord means by interpreting the present time, the things that go this way and that way.

As Winston Churchill once said very wisely, although not in a truly spiritual sense, "It's not good for us to always have our finger to the wind and our ear to the ground to see what the latest thing is." There's no future in that. There's no point in that, certainly not for Christians. What are the signs? How do we interpret the present time as the people in the gospel interpret the weather? They know how to do that. But what is the thing we need to interpret? Well, in this whole chapter, and indeed in the whole gospel, we see very clearly what it is. It is the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

At Bethlehem so many years ago, yes, but the coming of the end of time—that's what's important. We've got to live our life day by day in anticipation of the coming of the Lord. That's what's important no matter what the various winds of change and weather of our society are. That's what we need to interpret. And we interpret it, we understand this present time, by seeing it in the context of the providence of God, and not getting caught up in all kinds of little things. Whoosh, whoosh, all over the place. Winds go this way and that way, but that's not the signs of the times.

They always say, you know, if you marry the present moment, the present day, you're going to be a widower tomorrow. Poof, like that. Ashes, as we say on Ash Wednesday. We need to know that we live each day, each moment in the sacrament of the present moment, this present time, in the context of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Then we know how to act, then we know how to live. And we are reminded of that by saying each day, "How would I live if this were my last day? If I'm ready to meet the Lord." If so, live that way now, interpret that. The coming of the Lord guides us.

And we live the way St. Paul says in the Ephesians: "Lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace." That's what guides us. So how do we find, how do we interpret how we're to live in this present time? It's not just by looking around at what people are doing these days. No. We're to evangelize the world, we're not to be evangelized or un-evangelized by the world. We're here to set the world on fire with the Holy Spirit of God guiding us and strengthening us.

And so, what do we do? First of all, we need to be immersed in the word of God. Read the gospel all the time, read chapter 12 here of the gospel of Luke. Well, read the gospel readings and the Mass readings every day, but read a chapter of the gospel every day, and we will be able to interpret each day and all the days of our life. Then, having understood what we're doing this day in the life of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ at the end of time, at the end of our life. After all, that's the ultimate final exam when He asks us, "Have you loved the Lord your God with heart, and mind, and soul? Have you loved your neighbor as yourself?" No cramming for that exam. That's what guides every moment.

And, of course, not only that but, as we say in one of the Psalms, Psalm 90:12 says, "Lord, teach me the shortness of life and I will gain wisdom of heart." Lord, teach me the shortness of life, and I'll be able to interpret the present age in light of the coming of the Lord at the end of my life. Every day, my bags are packed and ready to go. We gotta be ready for that.

But also, if we're going to do that, we need to really live a life, not just simply understand our life in the context of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ at the end of time, which we do not know the day or the hour, or our death, which we do not know the day or the hour. But also the coming of the Lord in the Holy Eucharist—that is what the Lord has given to us so that we may encounter Him every day, hear His word as He speaks to us, receive Him in the Holy Eucharist, and then we'll be able to go in the peace of Christ to live a life of Christian virtue, as St. Paul calls us to in the first reading.

And then, we'll not only be able to interpret and understand this present age and the signs of the times, but we will be a sign for the times, a sign of our Lord Jesus Christ. We will be instruments of God's grace in the evangelization of this passing world as we journey through this valley of tears on our way home to our true home, the heavenly city of Jerusalem.