

1. December 2023

## Thinking about the end

Lk 21:29-33

*Jesus told them a parable, 'Look at the fig tree and indeed every tree. As soon as you see them bud, you can see for yourselves that summer is now near. So with you when you see these things happening: know that the kingdom of God is near. In truth I tell you, before this generation has passed away all will have taken place. Sky and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.'*

The liturgical year is coming to an end, and in these final weeks we are confronted with those biblical passages that show us how fleeting earthly existence is. Everything that promises us a supposed security does not last for long. Just think of an earthquake that can strike at any moment and shake everything beneath our feet. The earth, supposedly secure, begins to move and in a short time everything can collapse. Certainly, such a natural disaster is a sad and painful reality, and we can do our best at the human level to anticipate such catastrophes and take the necessary precautions. But at the end of the day, human capabilities cannot provide us with ultimate security.

Before the words we hear in today's Gospel, the Lord speaks to His disciples about powerful events that are about to befall the world, and we would do well to heed the lesson He concludes with: *"Sky and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."*

We Christians know this statement in theory, but does it really shape our lives? Are we seriously reminded of it in our sermons? Do we really seek our ultimate security in God and view all other realities from this perspective? Indeed, everything is shaky in these times. Even the Church - the firm rock and great security that we Catholics have always had - seems to be weakened and not sufficiently protected against the waves of this world that attack it.

It is obvious that we human beings find it difficult to think about the end. We like to settle down in this world and make it our permanent home. This attitude is understandable from a human point of view, but from a spiritual point of view it is very unwise, because we lose the strength and concentration of our soul, and we will hardly be able to perceive the signs of the times, which insistently point out to us what ultimately counts and, more precisely, remind us of the end towards which we are all heading.

What would it be like if we consciously lived in expectation of the Lord's return? Wouldn't that change our whole approach? Wouldn't we think more often about the end of the world, the Last Judgement or our own death? Wouldn't that help us to be vigilant and wise (cf. Ps 90:12)?

Even if we do not know the hour of Our Lord's parousia, we do know what He tells us about the end, which He concludes very clearly with this statement: "*Sky and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away*".

Therefore, if only to keep us alert, it would be necessary that the so-called "last things" do not disappear from the memory of the faithful, so that we do not fall asleep spiritually and are aware of the seriousness of our life choices.

But that is not the only reason to think about the end times; moreover, if we fail to do so, we are not living in God's reality. Then the day of the Lord's return will come like a "thief in the night" and we will not be prepared (cf. 2 Pet 3:10). Then it may be too late, as the parable of the foolish virgins suggests (cf. Mt 25:1-13). How much we would like to do this or that! But it might be too late...

God the Father, in His wisdom, has not revealed to us the exact moment of the Lord's return, perhaps also so that we will always be waiting for Him and will not postpone our conversion until the last day. In fact, conversion is not only about saving ourselves from eternal damnation; it is about rising from the dead, living in fullness and discovering the deepest meaning of existence. It is a true awakening from the confusion and lethargy of a merely earthly life. And if we continue to awaken more and more, becoming aware of the eschatological dimension, our life will acquire that vigilance which leads us to wait for the Lord like a bride for her husband and to work perseveringly in His vineyard.