

16. September 2024

The End Times

Lc 21:9-19

Gospel of the memorial of St. Cornelius and Cyprian according to the traditional lectionary

Then Jesus said to his disciples: "When you hear of wars and tumults, do not be terrified; for this must first take place, but the end will not be at once. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences; and there will be terrors and great signs from heaven. But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. This will be a time for you to bear testimony. Settle it therefore in your minds, not to meditate beforehand how to answer; for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and kinsmen and friends, and some of you they will put to death; you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your lives.

It is crucial for the Church to keep reminding us of the end times. We are moving towards the return of Christ. Although no one knows the day or the hour (Mt 24:36), there is no doubt that the time will come, just as the time of our death will surely come. In many places Scripture clearly teaches us that there is no natural evolution towards the best, however much speculation there may be to that effect. We can see this in human history. Certainly we have made some progress, especially in the external circumstances of life and living together. A great deal of scientific knowledge has contributed to the improvement of living conditions. But if we look, for example, at the barbarity of abortion, the spread of euthanasia, sexual perversion and many other things, we must soberly conclude that man does not necessarily change for the better in a purely natural process. It is only under the influence of grace that he is able to overcome the destructive abysses that imprison him.

In this sense, it is foolish to place our hope in men, in political systems, in human ideas, in an evolutionary process of history that is in itself positive, or in any other such construct.

We can have hope because of the goodness and love of God, who never tires of calling us home to His kingdom. We can have hope because divine love is not unstable like our human love, because God keeps His promises, because the Father's love does not give up in the face of our alienation, but seeks us unceasingly.

It is this hope in God's unchanging goodness that must prevent us from despairing in the face of the terrible events that Jesus foretells in today's Gospel. The Lord foretells wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, terrible events... False prophets will come to confuse people and great signs will appear in the sky.

Jesus does not hide from us the catastrophes that will befall humanity. The return of Christ will be preceded by terrible events. If we do not close our eyes, we will see that much of what is announced here has already been fulfilled. Indeed, much of what the Lord makes us see in today's Gospel has already happened, and other events may yet befall us.

We cannot, therefore, proclaim a world that will become harmonious and peaceful through the efforts of individuals alone. Both Scripture and history teach us otherwise. As right as it is to work to make our world a better and more just place, it is a mistake to expect this to happen primarily through the work of human beings. It is as much a distortion of reality to want to see only good all the time as it is to want to see only evil all the time.

We need to embrace biblical realism! We can hope for improvement as long as people respond to God's grace and are transformed in their hearts.

There will only be true peace when people know God as He really is and accept salvation in Christ! "Peace is only in God," said Brother Nicholas, the patron saint of Switzerland.

There can also be a false peace that somehow excludes God. In this sense, we see that at present there is an attempt to involve religions in the search for peace, but unfortunately at the expense of the uniqueness and singularity of the Lord's message.

In the last few days we have even heard the head of the Catholic Church speaking to young people at an interfaith meeting in Singapore, telling them that 'all religions are a way to God'. This is a serious deception that contradicts the witness of Scripture and the authentic teaching of the Church. We must recognise that a "different spirit" is at work here, one that no longer proclaims salvation in Christ.

Since this is not an isolated statement, but is placed in the context of many similar statements and actions, it is to be feared that the doors are being opened here to a kind of universal religion in which all religions are to be seen on the same level. This, however, would deny the mission of the Holy Catholic Church to bring the Gospel to all people according to the mandate of the Risen Christ (cf. Mt 28:19-20). The acceptance of the Gospel and the transformation of people's hearts by the Holy Spirit are indispensable conditions for the coming of that peace which only Jesus can give (cf. Jn 14:27).

Nor are political institutions capable of bringing true peace. It would be better to warn against them than to demand obedience to the ideologies they promote, because their anti-Christian character, which is often manifested, cannot be ignored.

So let us not be deceived and let us put all our hope in God, who will sustain us in all the terrible events that will precede Christ's return, so that they will not paralyse us. When we hear of these threatening scenarios, let us turn to the Lord, in whose nearness we can take refuge even in tribulation, in the certainty that He will return.

Yes, come, Lord Jesus! Maranatha!