

We are quickly coming to the end of the Church year. Days are getting shorter and colder and the world seems to be retreating within itself. Today's readings draw our attention to that day when this world will pass away entirely. God will sit in judgment, and the elect will be gathered together.

The words of Our Lord in today's Gospel sound harsh to some people. Many people today have an image of Jesus that is misleading. They see Him as a mild and gentle teacher, a live-and-let-live sort of person, non-judgmental, an all around nice-guy. They tend to overlook the passages of the bible that contradict that image. They forget that Jesus talks about judgment, punishment, and condemnation quite a bit.

Throughout the year Our Lord has given us this message in the form of parables, stories, and metaphors. But today, just in case we still aren't getting the message, He speaks to us more bluntly. Think of it as a kind of tough-love.

Just before the passage we read today, one of the disciples was drawing the attention of Jesus to the grandeur of the Temple. Jesus takes the opportunity to tell them of the coming destruction of the temple, the signs of the end, the coming persecution, and the great tribulation, all of which will culminate in the Coming of the Son of Man. He does this, not because He wants to scare them, and us, but because, out of His great love for us, He wants us to be watchful and ready.

Christ knows that the battle between good and evil will continue throughout human history. But He also knows that this battle will provide the opportunity for His grace to spread throughout the world. And when that expansion has reached its fulfillment, when everyone has had the opportunity to accept or reject His grace, then He will come to establish the definitive and everlasting victory of His Kingdom.

We generally do not give a great deal of thought to this aspect of our faith even though we affirm it every time we recite the Creed. “He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and His Kingdom will have no end.”

And so Jesus reminds us of these facts in no uncertain terms so that we have a chance to organize our lives and live accordingly, to build our lives on the everlasting rock of Christ our Savior. “Heaven and earth will pass away,” He tells us, “but my words will not pass away.”

He is not trying to scare us, He is trying to motivate us.

It is very easy to get caught up in our daily lives and schedules and to-do lists. But we run the risk of forgetting the “big picture.” We run the risk of neglecting our relationship with God. Jesus knows that nothing could be worse for us, for our eternal happiness. And our happiness in the life after this one is His greatest priority. He is not concerned about being nice, He wants to make sure we understand because time is running out.

His predictions of the end of the world, are a reminder of His love for us.

When we hold in our minds this truth of our faith, it can guide us in every decision we make along life’s path, because it reminds us of where we are going.

Saint Methodius, along with his brother Saint Cyril are known as the apostles to the Slavic people. They were tasked with the mission to evangelize what we now refer to as Eastern Europe. Sometimes this called for a little creativity such as how Saint Methodius converted King Boris of Bulgaria.

Boris had heard that Methodius came from the great city of Constantinople and that he was a skilled painter. So the king invited the missionary to visit him and decorate the walls of the rooms of his royal palace. The king enjoyed hunting and suggested that a nice hunting scene would be perfect.

Methodius set to work. When the king came to check on his progress Methodius begged him to wait until he was finished. Artistic temperaments aside, that's always a sign that things aren't necessarily going the way you would like them to. But the king was more interested in boasting of a mural by this great man and so he waited.

Finally it was ready, the painting was done and the king came to inspect it. He was shocked. It was a hunting scene all right, but it wasn't a serene hunting party gallivanting through the woods on a pleasant summer day. Instead he was confronted with a huge mural of the Last Judgment, in the form of the hunt for salvation.

On one side were those who died in friendship with Christ being welcomed into heaven by powerful angels and glorious saints. On the other side, those who had obstinately rejected or betrayed Christ's friendship were rushing around in terror pursued by demons. When they were caught they were loaded down with huge chains and dragged down into a foul pit of flames and reeking smoke.

The king started to shake and asked for an explanation of all the powerful imagery he was faced with. So Saint Methodius told him the whole history of salvation from original sin to the redemption in Jesus Christ, down to the very end and the coming of the Son of Man. The king listened, understood, and asked to be baptized. He found his guide through life's path. From King Boris the grace of Our Lord spread through the country and all of Bulgaria was converted, 1000 years ago.

Jesus will come again at the end of history to judge the living and the dead. He wants us to know that so we can live our lives in the light of Truth. But His second coming does not mean that He is not involved with us here and now,

every moment of our lives. Today's psalm reminds us that His love is ever present. "I set the Lord ever before me; with Him at my right hand I shall not be disturbed."

The fact that we are gathered here today is proof that He is active in our lives. He wants us to grow in wisdom, patience, joy, and courage every single day – not just on the last day. That is why He established His Church and His sacraments.

There is a connection between His future definitive coming, and all the ways in which He comes into our lives here and now. Whenever Jesus reaches out to us, inviting us to follow Him, it involves some kind of destruction, some kind of loss.

At the end of history, His Second Coming will involve the destruction of the fallen world in order to make way for a new creation. Here and now, when Jesus reaches out to us, we have to accept the destruction of our fallen nature, our self-centered tendencies, to make way for the new creation we will become in Him. With the help of His grace we have to enlarge our view of the world beyond our own wants and desires. We have to leave behind our selfish habits and let them be destroyed by the flow of God's renewing grace.

The Lord promises that if we do, we will shine brightly like the splendor of the stars.

The end of times may not come in our lifetimes, but it will come. Living or dead we will be held accountable for what we did here, and who and what we cared for. Even if we do not live to see the coming of the Son of Man, we have very few years in which to build our lives on the everlasting rock of Christ our Savior.

This is what Our Lord is telling us today. Time is short, we have work to do.