

Today's Gospel is from the same teaching of our Lord recorded in Matthew 24 and 25, what we hear from the last three Sundays of the Church Year. Where the Last Sunday of the Church Year is a serious admonition to be prepared, to not be foolish, because the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect, our Lord's teaching today, would have you not only be reminded yet again of His coming, but that you would look forward to it with expectation and joy, that you would long for it the way a bridegroom and bride long to see one another on their wedding day. Because for all the comforts and blessings of the Christian life now, the consolation of our Lord's presence among us already, it will be even better on the Last Day and for all eternity.

You do not have to be a Christian to recognize that things are not as they ought to be in this world. Creation is broken, seeming at times to die whether in the natural cycle of the seasons, or the shrinking forests and lakes. For all the wonder of how an eagle or hawk flies through the air, there is the horror of that same raptor catching a cute baby bunny and tearing it to pieces. Medical science has demonstrated the marvel of the human body, how it functions and heals, and yet for all that we have come to know and understand, we cannot stop aging or cancer, we remain subject to decay, and even the most hardened atheist is pained by the death of loved ones, recognizes the horror that those most dear to us will be taken away.

And all the while there is violence, on the grand scale between nations that, for all the hopes of progress in understanding and peace, never ceases, just pops up anew, or on a more local and individual level, and the chaos, pain, and injustice suffered by those who do not deserve such robbery, abuse, or scorn.

The world, the unbeliever, sees this reality as within our power to completely stop and reverse, and so in idolatry seeks to undo what Christ our Lord has said. These things will happen. Human nature, creation, the entire cosmos, are not subject to our absolute control. Or, the world says that all the horror and injustice and violence, this is just how it is, what it means to live in the world, there's really nothing you can do about it, just hope you avoid the worst and manage to somehow deal with whatever does befall you.

Of course that is not at all comforting, and so our Lord says that the nations will be filled with distress and perplexity at these things, their hearts failing out of fear and dread over all this. This happens because they do not know how to understand what they see and experience. And yet that will be nothing compared to what it will be for them at the Lord's appearing, the realization that what their crazy Christian family and neighbors always talked about, so prized over everything else, what the Church has continuously, unceasingly proclaimed, was true.

The Christian, by contrast, lives in hope. We too are not only affected by, but have sorrow over what befalls the world. But far more than a reason to grieve and weep, or lash out against God, we see every instance as a reminder that this is not all there is. That every occasion of these things is a sign of the world coming to its end, and we know what, we know WHO comes at the end. The storms that sweep over the world are violent and destructive. But these same winds that bring destruction are also the gales that usher in the springtime of God's eternal kingdom and the glorious sunshine of Christ's presence.

That is how our Lord teaches us to view these things, **“When you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near.”** He likens it to the fig tree, to all trees, not as they looked a month ago, dropping their leaves, seeming to die, but to when they bud, as they just begin to put out their leaves.

The eagles prey upon the bunnies now, and the bunnies live in fear, not just of the eagles but of us. For the Christian, every rabbit or squirrel that bounds away in fear or that lay torn on the roadside is a reminder of the day when the wolf will lie down with the lamb, when children will put their hands into snake dens and not fear. The world today does not know what makes for peace, wives and mothers grieve their husbands and sons, the day of weeping will cease. Every injustice, every crime that the innocent must suffer, will be avenged by the Divine Judge. And every loved one whom we lay to rest in the earth is placed in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection. The grave is not the eternal resting place, but a borrowed bed.

We do not enjoy this yet. We have the promise, the downpayment now, even as we already have life and fellowship with our Lord now. He lives, He has come, paid for our sins and risen from the dead. The worst part, the hardest thing to accomplish, has been taken care of. We wait in expectation and hope for what we have that is unseen and promised to us, to be shown visibly, enjoyed forever. The Scriptures show us how to view the worst of this world, in light of the absolutely assured best. This is the import of Jesus' comforting words to us, **“Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.”** What He has said and promised is absolutely sure, this is the basis of our hope, this is what we look and long for.

Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly!