

Thirtysecond Sunday of Ordinary Time

End Times

November 17, 2019

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It's the beginning of the end, Jesus warns. Doomsday—taken from the Latin, Dies Domini—the day of the Lord—its hard on our heels. Its what Jesus had been preaching from the day of his own baptism, “Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand.”

Jesus makes the end sound like one of those sci-fi horror movies, or more recently Marvel tag team superhero movies—innumerable hosts of warriors battling one another; magnificent cities to rubble, famines and plagues ravaging those left behind. But Jesus does not want to scare us. But he does want our attention, wake us up from our complacency. He does not want us to feel that we are doomed. He wants us to feel that we are saved. He does not want us to fear that we are condemned for our sins. He wants us to feel that we are loved in spite of our sin. But to appreciate just how much God does love us, to really feel saved, we first have to stop taking everything for granted. We have to recognize that everything we have, that everything we are, is gift--that all is grace, calling for us to be grateful to God and grateful to one another.

The temptation is to think that we have had to make it all on our own. The temptation is to think that we have had to do everything ourselves without much help. The temptation, to put it in other words, is to take the help that we have been given, for granted. Sometimes we have to lose that help to recognize that it was ever there in the first place. Sometimes we have to lose a parent, or a loved one, lose our job or our health, lose our peace of mind, even our will to live, to appreciate what we have been given, and have been depending upon, all along.

Jesus wants to wake us up to everything that we have been taking for granted all our lives, to recognized just how much we have been given, and how much we have been loved, all along. Partly because most of it will not last forever, and it would be a pity to really appreciate it only after we've lost it. Partly because of what it would do for us, to realize just how loved we really are. How it would transform us into being avatars of the divine ourselves, or in more traditional language, sacraments of God's love to those who depend on us, to those who need us, as we need them.

Jesus wants us to wake up and live before we die. For die we shall. The end of the world may be far off. But the end of our world will occur within our own

lifetime. When that day comes, may it not be a day of regrets, for opportunities missed, or of a love never spoken, or recognized.. We pray that it may be a day of gratitude and satisfaction for a life well lived. A day of generosity, handing over to those we love, to those who live on, what we have gained and learned from life. .

I begin the Sophomore Honors Colloquium on American Christianity with the movie American Beauty. Some students who have already seen the movie cannot fathom why we would watch such a movie in a religion class. Its pretty racy. A couple have even gotten pretty angry about it. But the movie is all about religion, and its absence, in contemporary American life. Its closing soliloquy is particularly fitting today.

Spoiler alert—Lester, our hero, literally minutes after having finally gotten his life straightened out, is shot and killed. In a voice over, as the camera shot rises above his house and up into the sky like Google Earth he says:

I guess I should be pretty upset about what happened to me. But it is hard to stay mad when there is so much beauty in the world. Sometimes I feel like I'm seeing it all at once and its too much. My heart fills up like a balloon that's about to burst.

And then I remember to relax, and to stop trying to hold onto it. Then it flows through me like rain and I can't feel anything but gratitude for every single moment of my stupid little life.

He closes by addressing the audience:

You have no idea what I am talking about, I'm sure. But, don't worry, you will someday.

May we too die with a smile on our face. Those at our bedside consoled that we must already be seeing the face of God.