Dear Friends,

Can ‘end times’ be good times?

There is a big hype in the media today about the “end of the world.” Scientists speak of it as the end of the planet earth. They point out that objects in space, bigger than a mountain, may stray from their orbits and strike the earth with a force more powerful than that generated by nuclear weapons. The impact will greatly disturb the earth’s ecosystems and cause the death of species, including human beings. If the giant projectiles miss, the cosmos has other ways of crushing or annihilating the planet. But scientists say that none of these will take place earlier than a billion years from now. There is no reason, you might say, to start worrying this for a minute. The Liturgical Year that is ending wants us to focus our attention on the ‘end times’ in a different way. All of us are waiting for the second coming of Jesus. This will be the day of His return. We recite the Creed at Mass and proclaim that Jesus “will come again to judge the living and the dead.” The New Testament writers used the Greek word Parousia which means the arrival and presence of a king, to describe this second coming of Jesus. When this day comes, Jesus will be acknowledged as Lord with the dead rising and all human beings judged in the presence of the glorified Christ, our King. When is he coming? Nobody knows. We only must wait. But wait patiently and meaningfully.

Today’s readings give us the assurance that our God will be with us all the days of our lives and that we will have the ongoing presence of the Holy Spirit in our midst guiding, protecting, and strengthening us despite our necessary human uncertainty concerning the end time when “Christ will come again in glory …” Next Sunday is the Thirty-fourth and last Sunday in our liturgical year when we celebrate the Feast of Christ the King, and the following Sunday marks the beginning of the Advent season with a new Liturgical Cycle – C – for our Sunday Readings for the 2021-2022 Liturgical Year. The readings invite us to focus our attention on the threefold coming of Jesus: 1) His first coming according to the flesh, as Redeemer. 2) His second coming, either at our death, or at the end of time and the world, which will bring our salvation to completion. 3) His coming into our lives each time we step forward in genuine Christian living which will prepare us for His final coming at the End of the world of time and space and the Final Judgment.

Mark’s Gospel, written some 40 years after Jesus’ death, is the simplest, shortest, and oldest of the four Gospels. This week’s Gospel text is taken from the thirteenth chapter of Mark, which, together with Matthew 24 and Luke 21, is often called the “Little Apocalypse.” Apocalypse literally means unveiling. The whole of Mark’s thirteenth chapter is full of apocalyptic imagery and predictions borrowed from the Old Testament writings especially of Daniel, Joel, and Isaiah. Jesus skillfully weaves all these various strands into one powerful vision. The Gospel of Mark was written in the year 69 AD, just one year before the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, at a time when the Romans were suppressing Jewish protests and persecuting Christians. Many Christians began wondering why Jesus did not return as He had promised. Some even wondered whether he had really been the promised Messiah. Mark in the 13th Chapter offered hope to a persecuted community by reminding the people of Jesus’ promise that wars, natural disasters, and betrayal by family members would be overcome when the Son of Man returned to earth to gather in His loved ones.

The application of image of the fig tree to the end of the world suggests that the end of the world will mean good (fruitful) times, for Jesus’ disciples, because their God will be bringing things to a triumphant end, and His Truth, Love, and Justice will prevail forever. Instead of worrying about the “endtime” events, we are asked to live every day of our lives in loving God in Himself and as living in others through our committed service.

Be blessed,
Fr. Tom Kunnel C.O.
FIRST READING
"But the wise shall shine brightly like the splendor of the firmament, and those who lead the many to justice shall be like the stars forever." (Dn 12:3)

PSALM
You are my inheritance, O Lord! (Ps 16)

SECOND READING
For by one offering he has made perfect forever those who are being consecrated. (Heb 10:14)

GOSPEL
“And then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory, and then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the end of the earth to the end of the sky.” (Mk 13:26-27)


WORSHIP & MEDITATION
HE SEeks US OUT in Love

GOSPEL MEDITATION
Encourage Deeper Understanding of Scripture

“And then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in the clouds’ with great power and glory.”

Take a moment to ponder these words from today’s Gospel. How does this image make you feel? For people to truly understand the significance of this message, something profound has to happen within. If we find ourselves reacting with a sense of dread or fear, we have to step back and ask why. Our answer will reveal a great deal about our relationship with God. It’s hard to fall in love with a God of whom we are afraid. God does not want us to be afraid. Nor does He want us to align our wills to His in order to avoid some kind of horrendous eternal consequence. That sounds like too much of a superficial power play on the part of God who continues to seek out His children in love.

In order for these words to carry any type of significant meaning for us, they have to resonate with and touch us on a deeper level. They have to be able to connect some dots and have meaning for us in order for this promise to change our lives. Sometimes we get preoccupied with the uncertainty of our deaths. Not knowing when or how we will eventually die can be unsettling. But, more so than needing an answer to the “when” of death, the “what” of death answer we provide has more significance. What happens to us when we die? Whether we die during the natural course of our lives or when Christ comes again, the experience is the same. If we believe that we are meant to live in union with God eternally and that death completes and does not diminish us, then it is worth our time and effort to wait in vigilant hope of the Lord’s coming in glory. Our journey back to God is something beautiful to be desired, not dreaded or feared.

Sadly, many folks believe that life is no more than a random occurrence without any purposeful direction or meaning. Death is simply death and nothing more. For them, the Second Coming of Christ and God’s eternal promise have no meaning. When we understand the truth about who we are, it changes things up. We then can see ourselves as works in progress who have the choice to either resist the inspirations of the Divine Artist or give into the wonderful creativity of His will. Life awaiting the fullness of Christ to come becomes an unfolding of Divine surprises and abundant joy. God is eternally merciful, forgiving, and welcoming. It is only when we directly reject this gift and turn our backs on Love itself that we have anything to fear.
**The first reading—Dan 12:1 - 3** Today’s first reading, taken from the prophet Daniel (167 BC), originally given to comfort and give hope to the Jewish people being persecuted by a cruel pagan king, advises us to live wisely and justly in the present time instead of worrying about the unknown future. In the second century BC, the Jews were conquered by the Greeks. The Greek king, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, tried to Hellenize the Jews by imposing Greek norms on them, by forbidding them to practice circumcision, by stripping the Temple of its valuables, by burning the Torah scrolls, by introducing the worship of Greek gods to the Jews, forcing the Jews to join in the worship of these pagan gods. In this frightening and dangerous time, the Lord God’s prophetic message to Israel through Daniel addressed the needs of the suffering Jewish people, bolstering their morale and promising them the sure and definite intervention of Yahweh, their God of power and glory, even if they faced persecutions and hardship for a short term. Hence, they believed that Yahweh was on the verge of stepping into the world and definitively changing everything (Dan 12:1-3). Today’s reading brings to a close the account of final warfare and the downfall of major foes (cc. 10 - 11). This passage is important because it is the first clear statement on final resurrection and eternal life found in the Hebrew scriptures. It is connected with a teaching on eternal sanctions for the just and the wicked. This breakthrough from the second century B.C. finally allows Hebrew thought to come to terms with the problem of retribution within parameters which go beyond the present life. God is victorious and protects His faithful through Michael and brings them home.

**The second reading:** Heb 10:11 - 14, 18 St. Paul continues to contrast the priesthood of Christ with the Jewish priesthood. This reading challenges us to look to the future with hope and serenity because Jesus, sitting forever at God’s right hand, is the Mediator. Who secured the forgiveness of our sins and our sanctification through His willing, sacrificial death on the cross. The letter to the Hebrews was written for Jewish converts to Christ, in part to help them cope with the loss of the comforts they had enjoyed within the institutions of Judaism and from which they had been excluded by their conversion. The author’s intent was to show that Jesus Himself had replaced those old institutions and exceeded them. In today’s passage, the institutions in question are *priesthood* and *sacrifices*. The author asserts that the old, repetitive sacrifices were futile, while the one sacrifice of Jesus makes us perfect forever and wins the forgiveness of sin, rendering further sacrifice unnecessary. Through Jesus’ saving gift of Himself, perfect praise has been offered to God, sin and guilt, have been expiated, and our absolute, intimate union with God has been achieved. For Jesus’ sacrifice made possible the forgiveness of sins and the formation of a new relationship between God and human-kind.

**Gospel Insights** Mk 13:24 - 32

Mark’s gospel was written shortly before the destruction of the temple. After it was destroyed and the church expanded its horizons, the expectation of an early parousia receded. The fact is that it did not take place as originally expected. The other synoptics attempt to soften the straightforward and clear words of the Marcan Jesus. But it did not occur in their lifetime; in fact, it still stands on the Christian horizon. Its symbolic force retains its significance. Christ’s death and resurrection remain the centerpiece of his triumph over evil. That has occurred. It was logical at the time to expect God’s final seal on that momentous event. The parousia stands for Jesus as Lord of history, a history which with its linear movement will one day have its end. And it is a history over which Christ himself presides. The final word will be his.

We have very little record of early Christian sentiment regarding Christ’s failure to return as expected. Was there widespread dismay or relief? It’s hard to say. There was certainly a period of adjustment when the importance of living the Christian life fully in the here and now came to the fore. The basic message still has an important ring. We are all destined to meet the Lord at some time, and preparedness is very much in order. The important thing about the parousia is the fact that Jesus remains the Lord of history, regardless of when he returns. And the final word will be his. That is easy to forget when the seemingly overwhelming "tides of change" carry us along with an inexorable inner force. We are asked to be part of that transformation, a new world order based on justice, love and equity.

The Jesus of Mark’s gospel is closer to us than in the other gospels. It is a gospel that merits a careful reading. For Mark’s presenting a Christ who suffers so much of the human, we can only be grateful. After all, he was like us in everything except sin. But the human factor only brings Christ closer to us and makes what he had to endure more deeply appreciated.
1. **Let us recognize the “second coming” of Jesus in our daily lives.** Today’s Gospel reminds us of a “coming” of God which we tend to forget, namely, God’s daily coming to us in the ordinary events of our lives. We must learn to recognize and welcome Him in these everyday occurrences – happy, encouraging, painful, or disappointing – always remembering that He comes without warning. Let us remember that the Lord is present wherever people treat each other with gentleness, generosity, and thoughtfulness. Hence, let us try to bring Jesus to earth, as St. Teresa of Calcutta (Mother Teresa) puts it: “by doing little things to others around us with great love.”

2. **Let us take heart and not be frightened:** The end of the world should never be thought of as depressing, disheartening, or frightening because we are in the hands of a good and loving God. Christ’s second coming gives us the message that God is journeying with us in the trials and difficulties of life, and that His word is ever-present as a light of hope. He speaks to us through the Bible. We have the Eucharist as a sign that God is with us, in our midst. Holy Communion is our point of direct, personal contact with God. That is why the holy Mass is special: the more fully and frequently we participate in the Mass, the more deeply the Lord can come to us, and the more completely He can remain with us. Let no one frighten us with disturbing descriptions of the end of the world because “the end” is all about the birth of everyone and everything into eternity.

3. “**Learn the lesson from the fig tree.**” Jesus tells us that our personal “endtime” is a prelude to eternal happiness. However, we are all so taken in by our secular culture’s fascination and glamour that we are sometimes embarrassed or saddened by the signs of our own approaching end. Our death is a sunrise to eternal life full of joy.

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**QUIZ TIME**

1. **What will the wise do?**
   A) A raven  B) Shine like the stars C) Run away from Michael D) Tell Daniel their dreams

2. **What did Jesus offer, to take away sins?**
   A) A sacrifice B) Money C) A lost sheep D) A self-help class

3. **Whom will the Son of Man send to gather His people from all over the earth?**
   A) Moses  B) Peter C) His angels  D) A bus

4. **What does Jesus use to teach His lesson in the Gospel?**
   A) A sheep B) A fig tree  C) A mustard seed  D) A chalkboard

5. **Who knows when the day of the Son of Man will be?**
   A) The angels  B) The Son  C) The Father  D) Saint Peter

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**QUIZ ANSWERS**


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1. “But the wise shall shine brightly … ” Tell your group your experience with a wise person and how it changed your life.

2. **How does the Eucharist help you to encounter "Jesus the High Priest"?**

3. Until we reach our final destination, what is the job of the Church while we are here on earth? What is your personal contribution in this regard?