

Jesus Was Wrong?

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B)

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We probably don't hear this statement said too often in church, but Jesus was wrong! Most scholars agree that Jesus, St. Paul, and other early Christians thought the end of the world would happen in their own lifetimes. After speaking about the sun and moon becoming darkened, the stars falling from the sky, and the Son of Man coming on the clouds with great power and glory, Jesus specifically says in today's Gospel, "amen, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place." As we know, the world is still in existence today and we are still here. The second coming hasn't happened yet.

While Jesus may have been wrong about the exact details on *when* the second coming at the end of time would occur, he actually was not wrong at all about *the truth* of the end times. What is most important about the end times is not when it will happen, but that it will happen. In this sense, Jesus was absolutely right about it. For Jesus, the truth of the end times is that one day, "heaven and earth will pass away."

Hans Küng, the Swiss priest and theologian who died this past April, explains it this way: "whether it comes tomorrow or after long ages, the end casts light and shade before it. Can we close our eyes to this fact? The world does not last forever. Human life and human history have an end. But the message of Jesus tells us that, at this end, there is not nothing, there is God. As God is the beginning, so too he is the end. God's cause prevails in any case. The future belongs to God. It

is with this future, God's future, that we have to reckon: we do not have to calculate days and hours." (*On Being a Christian*, 223) In other words, God is the constant in life from beginning to end. Everything else comes and goes. If we want to have our names written in the book of life, we must not put our faith in any worldly or even heavenly idols.

Practically speaking, knowing that everything will one day pass away changes our questions about life. Instead of asking, 'what career should I choose,' we should ask ourselves, 'what is the meaning of my life?' Or, instead of asking, 'what's in it for me,' we should ask ourselves, 'how can I participate in something larger than myself?' Or, instead of asking 'what will make me popular or famous,' we should ask ourselves, 'what sort of legacy will I leave behind for the next generation?' Or, instead of asking, 'has the world been good to me,' we should ask ourselves, 'have I left the world better than I found it?' All of these are ways that knowledge of the end times can help us redirect our focus to what truly matters. That was Jesus' point; the end times casts its shadow on all of history.

The end times are meant to warn us that everything ultimately will pass away.

For this weekend and next, as we hear more readings about the end times, let us not go down the path of trying to figure out the exact date, time, or year. No one knows that, not even Jesus did. Instead, let us focus on readjusting our questions while there is still time, for as Hans Küng concluded his above-mentioned quote, "in the light of this future of God we must shape the present...Here and now." (223)