

**November 17, 2019 What A Wonderful World Homily:** In 1967, the year of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Vietnam War and massive civil rights protests in the United States, a renowned African-American musician and vocalist, Louis Armstrong, recorded one of his most memorable songs, “What a wonderful World”. In one of nation’s most turbulent periods, his popular recording, which was the number one selling record in the United Kingdom, gave his listeners a reason to hope. Here below are some of the words of the song:

*“I see skies of blue and clouds of white*

*The bright blessed day, the dark, sacred night*

*And I think to myself, ‘what a wonderful world’*

*The colors of the Rainbow so pretty in the sky*

*And also on the faces of people going by*

*I see friends shaking hands, saying how do you do*

*They’re really saying, I love you*

*What a wonderful world”*

It is less than likely that such a sunny view of the world would be embraced by songwriters and filmmakers in our secular age in which the prevailing message of contemporary artists is so often dark and pessimistic. Our world, they argue, is endangered by global warming, overpopulation, the possibility of nuclear and biological warfare and untreatable diseases such as ‘superbugs’. Only recently a congresswoman from New York confidently predicted the end of the world in twelve years. Yikes!

Is ours a wonderful world? Is the end of the world imminent?

In today’s gospel (Lk.21:5-18), Luke presents Jesus as a prophet who could clearly read the sign of the times. He boldly predicts the coming destruction of the great temple constructed in the days of King Herod, and one of the architectural wonders of the ancient world. Now Christ loved the temple. He could not speak of it without great emotion. Indeed, he even wept over Jerusalem, the site of the temple. His sobering words must have shocked his audience, who had legitimate reasons to boast of its splendor. “Not one stone will be left on another”. (Lk.21:6) Jerusalem fell to the military might of Rome in 70 A.D.

For the devout Jew, the destruction of the temple was tantamount to the end of the world. As a symbol of Jewish continuity and survival, the effects of the temple’s destruction was catastrophic. All appeared lost. Even today Jews weep at the so-called “Wailing Wall”, the actual site on which the temple once stood.

It’s rather striking that for Jesus what most matters in his remarks to the assembled crowd is the Temple of his Body, the Church, and not buildings of brick and stone. He offers words of comfort to his disciples,

who will likely face persecution, arrest and the ultimate sacrifice, martyrdom. (Lk.21:12-17) The believer can be sure that he is safe in God's hand. "Not a hair on your head will be destroyed" (Lk.21:18), promises Jesus. They would not face their trials alone. Jesus will not let us fail if we trust him.

A story: In 1939, England's future seemed bleak, indeed. Hitler's military machine appeared to be invincible. England's sovereign, King George VI took advantage of an opportunity to address the nation in a radio broadcast. He counseled his people to trust God. He ended his stirring address by quoting from a poem written by the poet, Minnie Louis Haskins, "*God Knows*". "I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year, 'Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown' and he replied, 'go into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than an unknown way'".

The King's counsel to his people echoes Jesus' counsel to his disciples: "Trust God"

Let us not fear the future, even when it appears uncertain, and perhaps even frightening. History, after all, is in the hands of God. All our hope is in Him.

As Christians, can we echo the words of Louis Armstrong, "What a Wonderful World"? A resounding "yes" is our answer. And the reason should be quite obvious to a person of faith "God so loved the world that He gave his only Son". (Jn. 3:16) God entered our world and our history. He blessed our world by his presence. He continues to sanctify the world by his presence in the Eucharist. He promised to be with us always, even to the end of the age. (Mt. 28:20)

Praise God! Our world is truly wonderful!

Amen!