

Readings: [Thirty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time | USCCB](#)

Are we in the end times? Is this finally it? With the breakdown of the family, the greater disbalance on the climate, wildfires getting more and more severe, the division in the church, the strange new ideas society, the bazar culture and tension that covid has created... is this it? Will the stars finally start falling any minute now?

Some people think so. I did a quick search on YouTube for “the end times” and there were countless of recent videos from people of all Christian backgrounds saying that everything that is happening right now points to the end?

Even in some Catholic YouTube channels popular with people who get a little too obsessed with prophecies, Marian apparitions, and predictions from some unknown mystics, they too are making this claim. One video was titled “friar makes astonishing declaration: we are now in the apocalyptic battle!” and another was “Seer tells of a One to Come after Francis who will lead the faithful astray.”

I watched a couple of them and was left feeling depressed... then I read some of the comments... it was even more depressing... people are feeling really anxious about the world right now, so it is understandable how one might let anxiety drive them into thinking the worst and lead them to making strange predicaments, interpretations and conclusions about current world events, and further, be convinced that scriptural references, like what we hear today, confirm how they are feeling, all the signs seem to be there.

Well, is it? Are we nearing the end? If I may offer a word of advice today if you are feeling consumed by anxiety that the world seems to be ending: STOP IT! Stop using scripture to feed your anxiety! If reading the word of God is leading you to be fearful of the world, then you are reading it wrong!

As Christians, we are a people of hope. Sure, as Catholics we believe in the second coming, “the end of the world” so to speak... we profess that Jesus will come again to judge the living and the dead, but when and how that will be, we don’t know, and that’s not the point of scripture either, much less apocalyptic writing like what we have today.

I’ll like to take today as an opportunity to do a little catechesis on the apocalyptic genre, what it is, why it is written, what it is meant to do, what Jesus is talking about here, and how we can apply it *properly* to our current world events.

First, the reason we have writings about the “end times” today is because we literally are near the end of ordinary time. Next week is the solemnity of Christ the King, then advent, then Christmas, so the church has placed the readings precisely to help us transition from the end of one season, and the beginning of a new one.

Second, what is apocalyptic writing? It is genre, a style of writing which simply means “to reveal” or to “unveil.” Like all genres, it has a unique common style. In this case, apocalyptic writings mystical and spiritual in nature and use highly symbolic language borrowing imagery from landscapes, plants, animals, precious stones, and the cosmos to describe both current and future events.

Third, what is the purpose of these books? Why are they written? They were written during a time of psychological distress, when people experienced the anxiety of an unstable society. For example, the first reading today comes from the book of Daniel which is the prime example of Old Testament Apocalyptic writing. It was composed around 167-164 BC during the time when the Jewish people were experiencing persecution by Antiochus IV Epiphanes. The book of Revelation, which is the prime example of New Testament apocalyptic writing, was written during the harsh persecution of the first Christian communities by roman emperor Nero who is there described as the 666, the antichrist. In the case of the gospel, the apocalyptic words of Jesus are spoken in a time of high socio-political instability where going to war with Rome was a high probability, where Jesus himself would set the world into tension through the resurrection. So, apocalyptic books are written during these times of anxiety, not to make people feel more anxious, but precisely to do the opposite: to offer people hope for the future.

So, with that context, what is happening in the gospel? Recall that as we wrap it up, it is all coming together now, we are reaching the climax, and the main theme we are presented today is the temple.

Recall that the temple was the epicenter of Jewish identity. It was where God's presence was thought to be found and where people could make sacrifice in atonement for their sins, but it had become a tool for power. Herod had started a campaign to make the temple bigger and better, not so that it would be a place for all people to come and experience God's love and grace, but rather, as we saw last week, as a place to make a profit, a place where they were excluding people from

entering who were not part of the fold and taking advantage of the poor, not to mention the Jews wanted to go to war with Rome because of it.

This is where Jesus's words of apocalyptic judgment come in: STOP IT! The sun, moon, stars, sky, it will all come crashing down! All of those were images to describe the temple, because the temple was a symbol of a micro-universe, just like in our chapel we have stars on the ceiling, if the chapel is destroyed, the stars will literally fall. So what Jesus is describing, is the destruction of that temple, the end of that universe, that era precisely because it had become an obstacle to God's grace.

But this destruction was good news, because Jesus was bringing about a new temple, himself, so he is also talking about his own death and resurrection as he has been but they don't get it... Later on Jesus will reveal that his own body in the resurrection, and then through the Church, the Body of Christ, that that would be the new temple, a temple that would finally do what the old temple could not: forgive sin, unite people, and be a place of encountering the presence of God anywhere in the world, from the north, south, east, and west.

What Jesus is doing here is bringing an apocalypse, an unveiling of the corrupt temple system found in society and the human heart. We can call that the kingdom of Satan, where violence, pride, and envy reign. He is putting an end to it and establishing the Kingdom of God where a new set of Christian values, centered on the fulfilled *shema*, hear of Israel, love your God, neighbor and self, reign by allowing, not ourselves, but Christ as King to reign (more about that next week in solemnity of Jesus, the King of the Universe).

Understanding the apocalypse under this proper context, then we can use it to understand the world today. Yes, we can say that we are living in apocalyptic times right now, not because the end of the world is near, but because we are experiencing psychological distress, where new corrupt temple systems of the “kingdom of Satan have emerged just as there were then offering false hope. Part of our Christian faith is to be vigilant, watchful for these things, so that we can then allow the Christian values to put an end to those erroneous systems, and allow the love of God, which conquers all things, be what brings hope.

This is how we should be approaching apocalyptic literature, that it is how we can understand it, first in its proper context, and then bring it into a healthy and fruitful application today, away from anxiety and into Christian hope.

Where does that hope begin? Through the birth of a child... we end with apocalyptic readings that seem fear inducing, only to find the tenderness of a baby on the other side... life, hope, future... the apocalypse is meant to be a time of hope.

Are we in the end times? Is this finally it? Meh... I don't know... I don't think so, but ultimately, I don't know... What I do know is that I am really looking forward to Christmas. The incarnation helps center our fear and anxiety in the assurance that God is with us, and that is the message we should really be obsessing about.

+ *Fr. Carlos*