

## Homily ~ November 17, 2024 ~ 33<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time



I don't know about you, but I find the Scripture readings we just heard obscure and cryptic, very hard to get my head into. They're not the typical stories that I can easily

place myself in the middle of. Readings about the end time tend to be that way.

It reminds me of a "Peanuts" cartoon. Many of us grew up as kids reading only the cartoon section of the newspaper. In this one episode, Charlie Brown is laying back on a grass hill with his friends Lucy and Linus. They are staring at the fluffy cloud formation in the sky. Charlie Brown asks Linus what he sees in the clouds. Linus goes on and on and on, in great detail, about seeing islands in the Caribbean, then about seeing the profile of a world-famous sculptor, and he even sees Biblical scenes like the stoning of Stephen (the Church's first martyr), and he ends by pointing to a cloud that's in the perfect shape of the Apostle Paul. Then it's Linus' turn to ask Charlie Brown what he sees, and Charlie responds, "I was going to say a ducky and a horsie, but I changed my mind."

Charlie Brown might be more like Jesus than Linus is. Jesus doesn't want his followers to be preoccupied with having their heads in the sky. He doesn't want us to endlessly speculate about the end time or the Second Coming. We are awash in doomsday televangelists and conspiracy theories. They are doing us no good. Rather, Jesus wants us to live the best version of ourselves right here and now. Even he claims not to know the day or the hour. It's not his business and not our business, only God's.

What is our concern is feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the lonely, caring for our common home, the earth. That's faith in action. That's concrete, and that's something I can get into.

When the time comes for God to do something big, it will be obvious. Just as we are able to say summer is near when we see the branch putting forth its leaves, so will the coming of God in glory be. All of creation will understand it. I remember being on a Men's Rite of Passage Retreat, deep in the heart of Texas. The weaver (retreat leader), told us that when the Native North Americans would play the drums it wasn't for amusement or entertainment. The drum was the most sacred of all instruments, and the purpose of drumming was to signal that something important was about to happen. (That's what church bells were supposed to signal as well). When these indigenous people pounded the drum, it meant that they were ready to listen to the wisdom of the universe, including their ancestors who went before them. They also believed that when the drums were beaten all of nature was leaning in to listen as well. In other words, when you are at peace, the natural

world knows this and comes to you. The drums signaled that you were aligned with the natural world, the universe. That's why Saint Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of ecology, is always pictured with animals around him. He was at peace with all creation and even saw the created order as his brothers and sisters.

On the third day of this retreat, we were sent off to spend 7-8 hours by ourselves sitting in one spot in nature and not moving. On two separate occasions, deer came right up to me within a few feet, looked me in the eyes and were not afraid of me, nor were they in any rush to run off. That's how peaceful I was. Nature was leaning in. Now, the only things in nature that I can attract are mosquitoes!

About the day or hour, no one knows. Are we to slough it off as something only important to God and not to us? No, I don't think so. Instead we are to keep awake. Keep awake to what? To destruction and catastrophe? No. We are to keep awake to what God is doing in our times, right here and now. When darkness surrounded Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, and his disciples fell asleep unaware of the gravity of the situation, Jesus responded to them by say, "Could you not keep awake?"

Bill Galston was a domestic policy advisor to many of the past presidents of the United States including Bill Clinton. At some point he felt he had to leave the world of politics and return to being a university professor. In his own words he had "to strike a new balance" in his life. But while he still was in

politics he had a hand in the formation of the National Campaign Against Teen Pregnancy and was working on education reforms and promoting legislation to strengthen Head Start programs. In the midst of it all, he tried to make time for his son Ezra and even brought him to the White House office in the evening. Nevertheless, Bill still found himself consumed by his work. He was too tired in the evening to really enjoy his family. He felt the contradiction between the policy he was working on called “Putting Children First” and his own relationship with his son. What finally brought his world to an end was a note from his son that read, “Baseball’s not fun when there’s no one there to applaud you.” In that moment Bill’s world fell apart, and a new world began to emerge.

Jesus says that heaven and earth will pass away. I think that when he refers to heaven, he’s really referring not to heaven *per se* but to the Temple. For in another place he says that not a single stone of the Temple will remain up another. The Temple, for all intents and purposes—for the Jewish people—was heaven on earth. It was the physical dwelling place of God among us. That structure must go says Jesus. We are to worship not in some temple in Jerusalem or in Samaria, but we are to worship in truth. Where you seek and find truth, you find the most profound presence of God.

So, the heavens must pass away, but the earth must pass away, too, according to Jesus. Again, I think when Jesus is referring to the earth, he’s not referring to the destruction of the planet, our common home. I think he’s referring to the Roman Empire. Just as it was impossible for the Jews of Jesus

time to imagine a world without the Temple, it was just as impossible for the people to imagine a kingdom that wasn't the Roman Empire. That's how much heaven and earth--Temple and Roman Empire--dominated peoples' thinking.

Jesus is inviting us to open our eyes and to remain awake to another kingdom, the Kingdom of God, that is pushing into our world. It is a kingdom where the poor, the lonely, and the neglected are brought into the center. It's a kingdom where every kid has someone to applaud them at their baseball game.

So, we are to stay awake to what really matters. What really matters is our relationship to God, to each other, and to the earth. In some sense, every person in every generation experiences the end of the world and the last things. What will endure is Jesus' words that will never pass away. God didn't stop speaking to us when Jesus physically ascended back into heaven. God's design for the lives of his people and for the earth is far from complete. There is a great deal more to come in the life of each of us.

If we can put God's enduring word at the center of our lives, we will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. And we will know, in that moment, that Christ's second coming is near, at our very own gates. And instead of fear and trembling, there will be rejoicing.

*~Fr. Phil*