

ADVENT 2

Text: St. Luke 21:25, Romans 15:4.

WHAT DOES IT MATTER?

“And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and waves roaring; men’s hearts failing for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken.”

This morning I bring you greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior who tells us we do not know the time, nor the day nor the hour when He shall come in glory. AMEN

It is man’s nature to search for the truth, to look for answers, to speculate on what was or what might be. Just look at the proliferation of books, TV specials, articles and speakers who all present their latest version of their guess as to what the truth really is. Christmas specials on the major networks have been replaced by news magazines exploring the truth in such captivating shows as the “The Real Jesus” or “Jesus, the Man Behind the Myth”. One of the nation’s best sellers is the DiVinci Code, a novel which many find hard to accept is not a masked non-fiction book. Recent programs on the History Channel have explored everything from “Mary and Mary-the True Story” to the “Lost Books of the Bible.” There is broad speculation about everything from where did the children of Adam find their wives, did Mary have any other children, did Jesus marry Mary Magdaline and father a race of nobility, and it goes on and on and on. We watch these programs with fascination, buy each new book as soon as they hit the shelves and find ourselves exploring each new revelation wondering how much is true and how much is conjecture.

Even prominent religious leaders are not immune. This mornings Gospel speaks of signs where by we shall know when the end is near. I often hear great fundamentalist preachers relating how the end times will occur. Throughout history, people have tried to figure out when Christ will return. They have sold all they owned and waited on mountain tops. Some have gathered in camps and in anticipation of the next coming, committed mass suicide. While these are extreme cases, there are many more in mainline churches that seek to inspire a relationship with Christ through fear. Even some of our Roman brothers and sisters are not immune as they try to convince their “separated brethren” to journey home to the one true church where they believe only exists the true hope of salvation.

Is there any wonder why the world is going mad? Why we have tossed scripture onto the heap of ancient literature? Why we are adrift seeking answers and yet not seeing clearly what is right in front of our faces?

After watching a recent program about some new theory about who a group of experts thought Christ really was, my wife uttered one of the most profound statements of belief I have ever heard. She said “What does it matter, I believe Christ is exactly who He says He is and all the rest of this stuff is unimportant.” Why profound? Because in a world where man seeks to dismantle everything that our Lord and Savior has given us, this one statement tosses all of man’s efforts on the trash heap. Here in the haze of our own seeking was a clear view to the cross of Christ.

This mornings Gospel contains a great deal of information that alludes to the end times. There is no shortage of verses in scripture and the entire book of Revelation that speaks of the days of Christ’s second coming. But what does it matter?

Our Lord says “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.” Why should I worry? Our Lord has promised to those who believe the gift of salvation, eternal life, a pathway to heaven. What more do we need?

There exists today a great debate about the Bible and Holy Scripture. Contained in the pages of God’s words to us are the revelations of Himself. The words of our Lord, the law of the Old Testament, the good news of the New Testament all flow together to help us develop a closer relationship with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

This is not a book of stories, it is God speaking to us through the Holy Spirit. Stealing a metaphor from the computer age, I have often described the Bible as the only book you will ever use that has an automatic download. The messages of God as spoken through His son, through the prophets, through the inspired writings of the many authors of scripture, some known, most unknown, who have left us this important guide to use in shaping our relationship with the living God through the power of the Holy Spirit.

That is the critical understanding we need to embrace-our God is a living God, not one who just came to us for a short time 2,000 years ago. Our God continues to reveal Himself through the Holy Spirit which resides in all of us, imparted in our Baptism. Scripture is the fuel that fires His spirit and guides us in the strengthening of our relationship with our Lord. All that we do, our learning, our teaching, our witness, our worship, our works and our profession, comes from the faith that grows in us as we seek God's guidance through His word.

I have heard some say that we have a new revelation or that scripture should only be a guide or that tradition is as important as scripture or that reason is as important as God's word. When we embrace these concepts, that is when we stray from the path that takes us to the cross of Christ. Scripture is the revelation of our God to us. You can dissect it, point out its contradictions, say it lacks historical proof but none of that matters. God gave us His word through scripture and quite frankly, that is good enough. I do not question Christ's Virgin birth, His wisdom in my life, His death on the cross for me, His promise of salvation, His resurrection and His promise of coming again. As revealed in His word, it is a matter of faith and man's pitiful attempts to explain, question or even dismantle that truth is insignificant.

St. Paul in his letter to the Romans makes it clear. "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope." Do we need to question His spoken word? Do we need to question His promises to us? Do we need to question His dying for us? His Resurrection and triumph over the grave? If we do, than what hope do we have?

Man in His vanity will always seek to question God, to test Him, to cast doubt on His promises to us. That vanity and its end result is the work of the devil in mankind. That is why so many are lost, so many have no hope, so many are in despair-because they have been turned from God. To those who would seek to destroy all that God has given us, we can only say "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Every church and every person who has set scripture aside has eventually gone astray. When we do not seek to understand God's revelation to us through scripture by the power of the Holy Spirit, we allow our faith to be compromised. In that faith, we have the comfort of all that God has promised us in His dying for us on the cross, in the forgiveness of our sins, and in the joy of salvation and eternal life. If the Bible is just another book, than Christ is just another man.

Do not be misled. The revelation of the living God in speaking to us in scripture will always be questioned by those who do not understand Christ or the beauty of His coming. It is our obligation to witness to our faith, to try to guide those who are lost, to witness to the joy and comfort we have in our Lord through our faith. Deepen your faith in your daily reading of His word, in your daily devotions and in your frequent prayer. Glorify God in everything you do for in the end, that is what truly matters.

I pray that the study of scripture will be as important in our spiritual growth as our worship, as our nourishment through our sharing in the Body and Blood of Christ in the Sacrament of the Altar, in our repentance, in our works through faith, in our parish life. I pray that we will be able to set aside all the distractions of man. May all of these together lead us to a deeper and unquestioning faith in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and the gift He has given us through His grace and His unending love.

So I end this morning with a repeat of our morning collect-Let Us Pray:

"Blessed Lord, who has caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of they Holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou has given us in our Savior Jesus Christ." AMEN