

A week ago, the citizens of Paradise town were eating and drinking, dropping their kids at school and driving to work, marrying and giving in marriage when the fire ravaged their entire town. There were doing things at ordinary people do daily. In less than 24 hours, the Camp Fire torched Paradise homes, — businesses, supermarkets, restaurants and a retirement home. And since then the fire has devoured everything in its path. 80 dead, 1300 missing! By the way, we will have a collection the second week of December. Look at it this way. With all our advancement and technology, we have managed to contain the fire only 55% after nearly 10 days. When disaster strikes, we feel so helpless. Some will look at events such as this and say, may be the end is near.

Throughout the church's history, scores of people have been preoccupied with the end times. A good number of first-century Christians believed that Christ's second coming would take place in their lifetime. Around the turn of every century since then, people have predicted that the end is near. We get a similar feeling when we hear the words of Mark today:

"The sun will be darkened. And the moon will not give her light. The stars will fall from heaven. And the celestial powers will be shaken."

To use these words suggest total cosmic disintegration heralds the arrival of the son of Man at the end times. The question is, are we to understand this literally? Do you think that God comes again accompanied with destruction of the world that he has created? No! That is not the God I know.

The language here is the traditional language used by the prophets for the day of the Lord. We are dealing with the language of myth, charged with poetry, metaphor and fantasy.

Talking about end times, I have always been fascinated by the great philosopher and scientist of our day, French priest Teilhard de Chardin. Near of the end of his life, he wrote down his own theory about how and when the world will end. He said that at the dawn of creation God infused into living matter a mysterious creative force, which directed the evolution of life from the tiniest primitive form through all the evolutionary stages right up to the time when men and women came into existence. At that point he said, evolution was for most part finished. But he said, there is another type of evolution that continues to go on within living things: a mental-social evolution, the goal of which is to bring all living things closer together and closer to God. When complete and total unity of living beings with one another and with God has finally been achieved, a time he called omega point, then Teilhard says, the world will come to an end.

I don't know if Teilhard is correct or not, but it is a fascinating theory. Suppose for the moment that he is right. Is there anything to fear about the end of the world? No.. The world's end should not be seen as a tragedy, not cataclysm of destruction or cosmic disintegration but a perfect and beautiful union, which God intended from the time of creation. When we go back to the creation story where God created the world in 7 days. Remember how God ended each day with feeling proud saying "It is Good." And then on the final day, after he had created man and woman, how he said, "It is very good." Do you think God is going to destroy his creation that he was so proud of.

I would like to replace the phrase “end times” with “When we all get to heaven..” There is a hymn that our protestant brethren have been singing all the time.

When we all get to heaven...
When we all get to Heaven,
What a day of rejoicing that will be!
When we all see Jesus,
We'll sing and shout the victory!

I would like to address something practical when talking about “When we all get to heaven” - our own embrace of mortality and death. Comedian Henry Youngman in one of his doctor jokes, says, “A doctor gave a man six months to live. The man couldn't pay his bill, so the doctor gave him another six months.”

I have witnessed tremendous faith and trust as people embrace their death. I remember one of those moments very clearly. Last year I was called to anoint Cathy Streumpf as she was dealing with cancer. When I entered the room, there were over 40 people. Her entire family was there. And then, many from CTK who had shared ministry with her. When I arrived, everyone left the room so that I could have a personal conversation with Cathy. She shared with what was very dear to her heart, made a good confession and I gave her absolution. After, everyone came in, and lit a candle and together we prayed. I administered the sacrament of anointing of the sick. It was a celebration of her life even as she was dying.

There is a misunderstanding among people that priests should be called only seconds before their loved one's die. No! We would like to talk to them before death, and prepare them to die joyfully. I would love to visit you when you know you are closer to death, and bring God's compassionate love and mercy to you. I would love to pray with your family.

Talking of death sounds so morbid, but what God is really calling us to is life; he just desires to walk through death as a means to that end.

The best part of the liturgy of the world today is the responsorial psalm where we prayed, “The Lord is my inheritance!” King David will rephrase it so much better. “The Lord is my portion and cup.” Yes! When we die, our inheritance is the Lord.