

November 19, 2006
33rd Sunday of the Year (B)

By Father Charles Bowes

Daniel 12:1-3
Psalm 16:5, 8-11
Hebrews 10:11-14, 18
Mark 13:24-32

Whatever happens, God wins...and so do we.

As a kid I never liked hearing about the end of things I enjoyed – like vacations from school or holidays or a day spent fishing or visits with my older, married brothers and their families.

I never wanted any of that or life to end. And so, when at Church I heard every year at this time such stories about the end of the world and of life as I knew it, I quite naturally found it quite unsettling – all this talk about judgment and fire and chaos. It always sounded so brutal to me and unnecessary. Sure, we'll all die someday. And sure, the world will end, but do we have to be reminded of it? Aren't there enough problems each day to occupy us?

Our Scripture readings this week and next are called apocalyptic – a literature of an oppressed people in crisis and seeking reassurance of their ultimate survival. The closest analogue in today's culture would probably be films like the *Star Wars* series. Apocalyptic writing, like science fiction writing, comments on the present while pretending to be about the future.

Modern media and Hollywood movies are fascinated with apocalyptic images. Fundamentalist preachers continually predict the imminent end of the world, and countless numbers of books have appeared in which the “rapture” (saved souls being taken up into heaven in ecstasy) is presented. There is a fascination

with images of destruction and suffering of those who have not followed Christ. God will set the record straight and, according to many fundamentalist interpreters, only those who have believed in Christ will be saved. Catholic teaching is that Christ came to save all peoples, and salvation is not limited to those who have specifically known Christ. God's love is universal. Now that's something I find helpful to believe – and freeing too – it saves me from religious prejudice.

The apocalyptic message was once summed up as, “Whatever happens, God wins.” I find that a comfort. Because Jesus grows no older but forever passes from this world into the world to come. God wins, we all win. Life forever triumphs over death.

One would need years of Scripture study to figure out all of the apocalyptic imagery in the Bible. On the surface they appear frightening. But in Mark chapter 13, the image of the fig tree is one of hope. When the tree blossoms, you know that summer is near. By assuring us of an end time, when what we know of this world will disappear, it makes the present time all the more important. We know there will be an end to time and history, but we do not know when...nor do we have to.

All religions of the world call their adherents to be alert and prepared to see God or to enter into a realm of perfect peace and harmony. As the Buddhist teacher said: “Oh, children, you think that the goal of life is longevity. It is not! It matters not how long you live; it matters only how.” And when the rabbi tells his

students about the reign of God, he says something like this: "You won't be asked if you were like Moses, or Abraham, or Jeremiah. No, he will ask how you planted God's word in your hearts."

The truth is not found in science fiction about the end of the world. Saint Mark gives us the image of each of us appearing, in person, before the Son of Man. It will not be like a traffic ticket where we can send in the fine. No, Jesus will ask: "Is it you, Donald, Marie, Abigail, John?" Jesus is interested in where we stand, what kingdom we belong to, what word we serve, what truth we speak, what we have done in God's name - in this world.

It is in this world that we make it or break it. And with the resurrection of Jesus, in a sense, the end time is already here, suffused with hope. Our faith rests on that!

Let us pray: Help me to see clearly, Lord, and to trust that you are present at every moment. Remind me that I am always enfolded in your love, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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and so do we.