

Last Things

By Stephen Gabriel

“But in those days after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from the sky...And then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in the clouds’ with great power and glory” (Mk 13:24-26).

We generally don’t like thinking about the end of the world or the end of our lives. They are usually regarded as dark thoughts – gloomy or depressing. Yet, for a Christian steeped in faith, death is the beginning of paradise. Such a prospect ought to bring joy to our hearts.

Our dread of death is, of course, natural. It’s the result of a powerful instinct given to us by God. But that only explains part of it. Our fear of death is also the result of our weak faith and the guilt that we all carry for our personal sins.

After all, the day of our death will be the day that we must stand before God and make an account of our lives.

While it might be more comfortable to avoid thinking about these last things, the Church in her wisdom makes sure that we do consider them by incorporating appropriate readings into the liturgy at the end of the liturgical year.

The Church urges us to contemplate our death and judgment from time to time not to depress us but to encourage us to reform our lives. We all need to change. Our Christian vocation is a demanding one. And we all fall short to some degree.

The thought of our judgment should lead us to a sincere examination of conscience: Our Lord gave His life for me, personally. What have I done for Him?

This is not an academic question. It’s one that we all must answer in rather concrete terms. Jesus made it clear how He wants to be loved: “If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love” (Jn 15:10).

Like it or not, we have all been given a specific period of time to spend here on earth. The time that we have been given can be likened to the talents entrusted to the master’s servants. Our Lord expects us to use our time on earth as if it were a great sum of money. We can invest that sum wisely, doing God’s work and bearing much fruit. Or we can squander it, ending our lives with little supernatural fruit to offer God on the day of judgment.

For the ordinary layman, the fruit that God is looking for is not beyond anyone’s capabilities. By carrying out the duties of our vocation with love, striving to please Our Lord in everything we do, we can earn our place with Him for all eternity.

The first step is to ask God for the humility to become childlike, so we can rely on Him to help us grow in virtue. As we grow in humility, we find ourselves constantly asking God for the grace to overcome our defects so that we can grow in holiness.

Most of us have been called to the vocation of marriage. Hence, our path to heaven is lined with the struggles associated with married life. If we approach these struggles with a supernatural outlook, they take on an entirely new dimension. Our struggles will become the cross of Christ – the very means of our salvation!

As Christians, we cannot flee the cross. If we do, it only brings us sadness. If, on the other hand, we embrace the cross, we find the joy of Christ. And we see in our struggles the redemptive aspect that enables us to identify with Jesus.

I believe we were all created to leave a legacy to society. A truly great life is not, however, one that has built monuments or a great organization. A truly great life is one that has overcome the obstacles in its path to holiness, touching many souls, drawing them closer to God. It is a legacy of souls changed for the better.

With the help of God's grace, the last judgment will be a great reunion of souls who have helped one another grow in holiness during our sojourn in the world.

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