

FROM THE PASTOR'S PRINTER

The End is Near, or Is It?

As the seemingly unending pandemic rages on, and is compounded by social unrest, I have lately heard some people say that they are worried that the end of the world is coming soon. How will they protect their loved ones from the end time? What do they need to do to be prepared? Stockpile? (They already have enough toilet paper to last them well into eternity!) Move to a remote location? (The people on the east side of Cincinnati think that we in Harrison are already a remote location.) These people are correct in the sense that, yes, the end is coming. What they may be incorrect about is that it is coming soon. Now, I am not saying that the end is not near. I have no idea. Jesus himself didn't know (Mt 24: 26), and while I often think I am God, I do not think I know this.

There are several things that come to mind in light of these fears. First of all, what we fear is real to us. If I fear a bogeyman under my bed, to me the bogeyman is real, or at least *could* be real. Whether it is from an over-active imagination, or as Scrooge says in Dicken's Christmas Carol, "a bit of undigested beef," what we fear seems like it very much could happen. When we live in a world which to us has been a very stable and set reality, and then we have something come into our lives that we cannot even see or easily stop, compounded by unease in society, we can look and easily think that the end is near. Lest we think that those who fear this are not that bright, there are several great saints who thought this very thing in their own lives, especially during the various invasions of Europe by our ancestors. As cities and society were ravaged, they were sure it was the end time.

Secondly, what strikes me is that what we fear is relative. While CV and societal discord are new to us and therefore frightening, there is much of the world which commonly lives with more sicknesses, epidemics, death from much less

serious illnesses, and social strife than we do. What we are going through right now is, while not necessarily everyday living, a very familiar part of their experience. It would not dawn on them that this is the beginning of the end because this has been their story for years or even generations.

Thirdly, the following point was brought home to me in last Tuesday's first reading at Mass from St. Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians, 2: 1-4, 14-17. The Thessalonians, who were poster children for living in Christ (unlike the Corinthians), were fretting over whether the end time was here, apparently because of false teaching, prophecy, or a letter they had received from someone. Should they quit their jobs? Should they run for the hills? Paul tells them not to listen to false teachings, but to continue with what is rooted in the truth that they have learned from him (which comes from the Spirit). Paul taught that the end time is of God's choosing and while cataclysms and riotous behavior among mankind will be part of the end time, not all cataclysms and disorder are signs of the end time.

If we don't know when the end time is, how are we to prepare for it? Paul gives the answer here and in other places. By living our lives in such a way that we are always ready for Christ to come, whether for any one of us through an untimely death or all of us at the end of the world. The preparation that we are to make is ultimately not about funeral plans and wills (although that is helpful for those we leave behind), but rather about our lives being in union with Christ continually, not just by luck on the last day. As St. Paul said to the Thessalonians, "stand firm and hold to the traditions [i.e., the way of Christ] you were taught" as they lived in those uncertain times. As we live in our own uncertain times, may we hold to the faith of Jesus Christ, a faith rooted in the love of God for us, and in turn, our love for God and all people.

God bless all who begin new things and old things in new ways this fall.