

At this time of year, with the colluding of the liturgical year, we hear the apocalyptic readings.

The concept of the end of the world has multiple meanings: the collapse of the cosmic universe; the moment of each individual's death; and those tragic moments when our lives become unraveled. The message of this gospel applies to all of these.

Fundamentalists relish the thunder of apocalyptic biblical passages, trying to tell us when and where.

Our Catholic tradition views them differently. Apocalyptic writing is NOT to be understood as a time prediction or a scientific description of the end of the world. It is an allegory of the struggle between good and evil with the promise that goodness will ultimately triumph.

The end of the cosmic world will not be a disaster, but a fulfillment. It will be a transformation of this world into something better. The end of the world will not be "the end of the world." The shape of this world, now deformed by sin, will pass away.

Apocalyptic scripture was never intended to instill despair or fear of the future. It was written to instill hope and courage in the present struggle. These descriptions of the end of the world were written to assure oppressed Christians that their persecution was not the end of the Church.

*It also has a relevant message for every generation. The Lord is teaching us that right up to the end of history, there will be tension and turmoil. Every generation will have its own persecutions to combat. Every generation will have its own natural disasters to deal with. And every generation there will always be the nuts who try scare us, "This is it for sure!"

Honestly, the collapse of the cosmic universe is not something I worry about a great deal nor should the second end - the moment of each individual's death. Yes, the older I get the more I ponder it, but no one gets out of here alive.

The 3rd end might be something more pertinent to us: those tragic moments when our lives become unraveled. What we placed our hopes in begins to collapse around us. In today's gospel, the disciples thought that the magnificent temple in Jerusalem would last forever.

The Temple was the very heart and soul of Judaism. Palestine was occupied by the Romans. The Jewish people had no real government of their own. So their whole national and spiritual identity was poured into and represented by the Temple. The Gospel says it took forty-six years to build.

So the disciples are shocked to hear Jesus say to them, "All that you see here, the days will come when there will not be left one stone upon another stone that will not be thrown down." That prediction came true some 40 years later when this magnificent temple was totally destroyed by the Roman Empire

I suspect we all have had our temples on which we have placed out hope that may have gone to the wayside. Not all temples are built of marble and gold. It could be our major in college not working out. Perhaps our temple was a business that failed. It could be our parish, changing with different people or ways worship. It could be a political party, one we voted for was defeated and from this friends turning against friends; labels and angry words.

We can turn on one another or we can turn to Christ for one another. The power of the Risen Christ is not depleted. It is inexhaustible and is there for every generation. The future is not shaped by those who keep looking back to weep over what is gone.

It belongs to the person with faith, vision and confidence in God. When our temples fall down, the Lord is telling us in this Gospel that this is not the end of the world. This Gospel is a word of hope for any crisis.

The future in our society and in our own life is not built by those who just keep looking back but by those who are willing to look ahead and place our faith in Christ.

We have to ask ourselves the question, what is it in this world that is truly enduring, truly worthwhile and important? A friendship or a political party? Our wealth or a loving family?

+I remember a scene in Schindler's List. He saved many, many people giving away much of his acquired wealth. But in the end he still had something like his car, thinking why did he have it over human life?

What will endure in this life are the spiritual realities of love, compassion, concern, forgiveness, understanding, and friendship. All of these are description of God, who is eternal.

We humans can build a magnificent temple, a spectacular business, or a fortune, knowing it can be lost or destroyed someday.

But instead, we are asked to build on love, on friendships, on a loving family, knowing that these are the fruits that will endure and last forever.

Christopher Reeve, popularly known for playing the part of Superman in the movies, was severely injured while riding his horse. He was paralyzed for life. In his book entitled, "Still Me," he writes about his wife, Dana, coming to the hospital to visit him for the first time.

She told him, "Chris, I will be with you for the long haul... no matter what." Then she added, "You are still you, and I love you!" (while his body collapses)

So when we hear about tragedies or experience tragedies in our own lives or when we read about the end times - however you want to define that - it's comforting to know that God's unconditional love is saying to us, "Don't be afraid and don't worry. I will be with you over the long haul, no matter what!" Then God will also say to us, "You are still you, and I will always love you." Yes, build on that.

We do not know when the final day will come. It will come in the Lord's own time. But when it does come, the Lord should find us doing what we were baptized to do. Whatever may have fallen down in our life or in our society, the Church stands for a single truth, represented by all the spires that point upward from cities, towns and villages: we always have a new future to build in Christ.