

33B 2018 SML
MK 13:24-32

Each year, as the liturgical year comes to an end, the scripture readings at Mass become eschatological in nature.

Eschatology is the study of last things:

- ✓ judgment,
- ✓ the end of the world,
- ✓ the second coming of Christ,
- ✓ heaven, hell and purgatory.

Some are very uncomfortable with the eschatological because things eschatological are yet to happen. Most of what is eschatological would need to be predicted to be pinpointed, and that is difficult to do.

Nevertheless, some feel they can foresee the coming of the end of the world with the signs listed in today's gospel:

- ✓ The sun will be darkened
- ✓ The moon will not give its light
- ✓ The stars will be falling from the sky.

The signs listed in today's gospel merely reechoed all the signs the Jewish people very definitely expected at the first coming of the Messiah, as prophesied by Isaiah, Ezekiel, Amos, Joel and Daniel. Instead:

- ✓ the sun was not darkened,
- ✓ the moon gave its light,
- ✓ the stars did not fall,
- ✓ He was born of a carpenter's wife,
- ✓ He was mistaken as a mere prophet,
- ✓ He rode into the city of his death on a donkey
- ✓ and was crucified as a slave between two criminals.

Pinpointing the end of the world is fruitless says Our Blessed Lord in today's gospel. "Of that day or hour, no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."

And what would be the point to pinpointing the end of the world in the first place? So as to make a deathbed conversion? So as to make it just under the wire as did the good thief at the Crucifixion?

Let's go to the crucifixion and recall the two criminals. Mentioned in all four Gospel accounts, the two who were crucified with Our Blessed Lord were called thieves by two of the four evangelists. Whatever else they had stolen in their lives, many would say the one, commonly called "the good thief," stole at the end, a reward he did not deserve; according

to Luke, the first one home, the first one in, was a thief. Right out of the salvation gate, the last was first.

And for some, “the last shall be first” is a very slippery slope, as they will be quick to sarcastically ask, “What’s the point of being a Christian if, in the end, those the likes of the good thief are saved?” People who ask that should listen to themselves.

- ✓ What’s the point of being first rather than last in serving Our Blessed Lord whom you love?
- ✓ What’s the point of being found rather than lost?
- ✓ What’s the point of knowing the truth rather than living in ignorance?
- ✓ What’s the point of being welcomed home like the prodigal son by the waiting father rather than languishing by the pig sties?

What’s the point? The question answers itself.

But just in case we do not get the point, the point is that, in this life and in the world to come, those who follow Our Blessed Lord will receive everything they want, if what they want is to follow Jesus. On the other hand, if following Jesus is not what they want, then the answer to the question, “What’s the point?” is there is no point in following Jesus, and living in

the way, the truth and the life is evidently less preferable to the alternative, which is being lost, ignorant and dead.

No offense, but people who have to ask “What’s the point?” probably would not understand the answer to the question anyway.

- ✓ Those who are banking on the same approach as the “good thief,” who will turn to their Blessed Lord at their final hour and ask Our Blessed Lord to remember them when He enters His kingdom;
- ✓ those who are banking on the last being first;
- ✓ those who are placing their bets on a death bed conversion

are playing the most terminal form of Russian Roulette. They are not banking on living a good life, but on being justified by faith, cheap faith. And to those who make so much of being saved, or justified, by cheap faith alone, I will close this homily in the words of the late Richard John Neuhaus:

When I come before the judgment throne, I will plead the promise of God in the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

I will not plead any work that I have done, although I will thank God that He has enabled me to do some good.

I will plead no merits other than the merits of Christ, knowing that the merits of Mary and the saints are all from

Him; and for their company, their example, and their prayers throughout my earthly life, I will give everlasting thanks.

I will not plead that I had faith, for sometimes I was unsure of my faith, and in any event, that would be to turn faith into a meritorious work of my own.

I will not plead that I held the correct understanding of “justification by faith alone,” although I will thank God that He led me to know ever more fully the great truth that much misunderstood formulation was intended to protect.

Whatever little growth in holiness I have experienced,

whatever strength I have received from the company of the saints, whatever understanding I have attained of God and his ways – these and all other gifts received I will bring gratefully to the throne.

But in seeking entry to that heavenly kingdom, I will, with the good thief, look to Christ and Christ alone. Then I hope to hear him say, “Today, you will be with me in paradise.”¹

¹ John Richard Neuhaus, Death on a Friday Afternoon, p. 70.