

33rd Sunday C 16th & 17th November 2013

The theater is on fire: The Danish philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard, tells the parable of a theater where a variety show is proceeding. Each act is more fantastic than the last, and each is applauded by the audience. Suddenly the manager appears on the stage, apologizing for the interruption. He announces at the top of his voice that the theater is on fire, and begs his patrons to leave the theatre immediately, without causing a commotion. The spectators think that it is the most amusing turn of the evening, and cheer thunderously. The manager again feverishly implores them to leave the burning building, and he is again applauded vigorously. At last he can do no more. The fire races through the whole building engulfing the fun-loving audience with it. "And so," concludes Kierkegaard, "will our age, I sometimes think, go down in fiery destruction to the applause of a crowded house of cheering spectators" (Resource, July/August).

Today's readings warn us about a similar fate if we are not well prepared when the "Day of the Lord" dawns quite unexpectedly, marking the end of the world.

The central theme of today's readings is "The Day of the Lord" or the "Second Coming" of Jesus in glory, as Judge, at the end of the world. They warn us about the final days of the world, our own death and the final judgment. Scripture lessons: Malachi in the first reading foretells this Day, which will bring healing and reward for the just and punishment in fire, for the "proud and all evil doers."

Although St. Paul expected that Jesus would return during his lifetime, he cautions the Thessalonians, in the second reading, against idleness, anticipating the end of the world. Paul advises the Thessalonians that the best preparation for welcoming Jesus in his "Second Coming" is to keep working and doing one's duties faithfully, as he did.

Today's Gospel passage clarifies that the date of the end of the world is uncertain. Signs and portents will precede the end, and the Christians will be called upon to testify before kings and governors. The Good News is that those who persevere in faithfulness to the Lord will save their souls and enter God's

eternal kingdom. Christ's Second Coming is something to celebrate because he is going to present all creation to his heavenly Father. That is why we say at Mass, "We proclaim Your death, O Lord, and profess Your Resurrection, until You come again." Since Luke's community had experienced much persecution, today's Gospel gives them the message: don't give up because God is always with us. Jesus' promise of the protective power of a providing God was meant to encourage His disciples to persevere in Faith and its practice. Jesus also includes the signs of the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world, to prepare His disciples and to remind them to rely upon Him for Salvation, not their own power.

Life messages: 1) we must be prepared daily for our death and private judgment. We make this preparation by trying to do God's will every day, leading holy lives of selfless love, mercy, compassion and unconditional forgiveness. In order to do this, we must recharge our spiritual batteries every day by personal prayer, that is, by talking to God, and listening to Him by reading the Bible. Daily examination of our conscience at bedtime, asking God's pardon and forgiveness for the sins of the day, will also prepare us to face God any time and give an account of our lives.

2) We need to attain permanence in a passing world by exemplary lives. We must remember that our homes, our churches and even our own lives are temporary. Our greatness is judged by God, not on our worldly achievements, but on our fidelity to Faith and its practice by loving others. How our faithfulness is expressed each day is the most important thing. We are to persevere in our faith, in spite of worldly temptations, attacks on religion and moral values by the atheistic or agnostic media, threats of social isolation, and direct or indirect persecution because of our religious beliefs. Let us conclude this Church year by praying for the grace to endure patiently any trials that are essential to our affirmation of Jesus as our Lord and Savior.