

# Holy Wednesday

## The Olivet Discourse

### Part I: “Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming, and of the close of the age?”



Enrique Simonet  
*Flevit Super Illam*, 1892

#### Preface to Holy Wednesday

We all love a good story. We want to identify with the protagonist, and we cheer for him or her when they escape the clutches of the antagonist. When faced with obstacles and threats we wonder if we would handle them with as much aplomb as our protagonist. We observe that while our protagonist grows in determination, courage, and commitment towards justice, our antagonist descends further into villainy. We can't put the book down, and race to finish the book to see how it will end. Sometimes it seems that the characters are being drawn towards an inevitable end as if their destinies are ordained by the weaving of the sisters of Fate. Well, in the case of fiction, that is exactly what happens. The author places characters within a setting, gives to each of them a personality, a set of values, strengths, weaknesses, quirks, etc., and then in an act of creation the author, as “prime mover,” kicks off an event which sets everything into motion. The characters do not know where things are heading, and neither does the reader; only the author knows, as he directs the character towards their final destiny. I have at times caught my wife sneaking a peak at the final chapter of a book.

“I couldn't take it; the tension was just too much for me,” she would say defending herself as if she had been caught cheating on an exam. “I wanted to make sure it had a happy ending before I read any more.”

If that is true for a well-written novel, imagine what it would be like if you could sneak a peek at the ending of the greatest story ever told, the one written by God and found in the pages of the Bible. Here is the greatest adventure and love story of all time; it has the Protagonist of protagonist, Jesus Christ, and the most devious, malevolent, and cunning antagonist in all of history and literature, Lucifer. The setting: earth. The conflict: redeeming humanity and preparing a Bride for the Son of the Father. It is a conflict that began in the first book of the Bible, Genesis, and ends with a New Beginning with the Marriage of the Lamb in the Book of Revelation. There have been many amazing characters in this story, Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Debra, David, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel just to mention a few from the Old Testament, and from the New Testament there's Mary and Joseph, Peter and the Apostles, Mary and Martha of Bethany, and Mary Magdalene, and Saul of Tarsus, again, just to name a few. The story continues with the Church and the saints, martyrs, and everyday believers known to God alone. We are privileged to be a part of this greatest story every

told, placed here in this time and place with an important part to play; a part that the Author has ordained for us since the foundation of the world. Wouldn't you, like my wife, like to take a peek at the ending if you could? I know I would. Most authors wouldn't approve, but the Divine Author is not only okay with you sneaking a peek, He wants and expects you too. Why? Because unlike the characters in a novel, this Author has given His characters *free will*, along with everything we need in the way of knowledge and wisdom (Holy Scripture, Tradition), along with the graces and sacraments so that even in our weakness His strength can empower us to not only will to do His will, but to accomplish it. There is just one caveat, we must say "Yes" to His will; to play the part that He has written for us in this greatest of all dramas, and saying, "Yes" is difficult particularly when it involves the cross. Even Jesus struggled with this in the Garden of Gethsemane, but in the end He took up the cross His father ordained for him. How did He do this?

*...looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. (Heb 12:2)*

It was for the "joy set before him" that Jesus endured the cross, the joy of being seated at the right hand of the Father, and a Bride, the Church, to share in His glory. Jesus got a peek at the end of the story and He knows that we will also need a peek not only at the end of our story, but the Church's story and that is what the Olivet Discourse is all about. Jesus gives His disciples a peek both at the imminent events that would soon befall Israel, but also what the Church will face at the "End of the Age." "To be forewarned is to be forearmed," and this, in a few short words, summarizes the message of Matthew chapters twenty-four through twenty-six.

### **Different Perspectives on Prophecy**

We shouldn't be surprised that there are different perspectives on Biblical prophecy, these differences often cut across sectarian lines within Christianity, but also within denominations. There are several lines of thought regarding prophecy which I will attempt to summarize, but I would like to do this in the context of the Olivet Discourse since we will be directly examining whether or not it has any prophetic significance to us today. First, there are the "Preterists," who hold that the prophecies that Jesus spoke in His Olivet Discourse were fulfilled entirely with the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD to the defeat of the *bar Kokhba* rebellion and the *diaspora* of the Jews from Jerusalem and Judea in 136 AD. For Preterists the Olivet Discourse is an example of imminent prophecy as it was meant for the people to whom Jesus was speaking.

Then there are the "futurists" who believe that Jesus was speaking about a future generation, specifically those who would be living at the "end of the age" when He would return again in glory. For "futurists" they believe that Matthew 24 (and Mark 13 and Luke 21) serve as a blueprint for "end time events" and as a means of "decoding" the Book of Revelations. There are a few more "-ists," including "Idealists" who pretty much take all prophecy as symbolic and as a consequence you'll find that idealists can impose upon prophecy just about any meaning they want. Then there are folks like me who believe that prophecy can have both fulfillments in the past, present, and the future. If there is a name for this understanding of prophecy I haven't found it, so I might as well give it a name and given the fact that my background is science, specifically chemistry, I will borrow from my knowledge of chemistry. I'm going to call prophecy that has both historical, present, and future relevance as "polyvalent." Polyvalence is a phenomenon that arises from the fact that some atomic ions are "monovalent," that is, they have only one ionic form (example:  $\text{Na}^+$ ,  $\text{Mg}^{+2}$ , and  $\text{Br}^-$ ) whereas some atomic ions are polyvalent ions with multiple ionic forms (example:  $\text{Fe}^{+2}$  vs.  $\text{Fe}^{+3}$ , and  $\text{Pb}^{+2}$  vs.  $\text{Pb}^{+4}$ ). This idea of "polyvalent" prophecy was already demonstrated in my essays on Palm Sunday through Holy Tuesday in regards to the prophecies found in the Book of Ezekiel. If you remember I made the claim that the prophecies of Ezekiel were applicable for the time of the Babylonian Captivity, the events of Holy Week, and the Church age including now and the "end of the age." I believe that such an approach was not only reasonable for the scriptures we discussed for Palm Sunday, Holy Monday and Tuesday, but for Matthew chapter 24 which we will discuss in this Photo-Journal essay on Holy Wednesday.

### **Staying Focused on the themes of Palm Sunday through Holy Tuesday**

Books have been written about chapter 24 of Matthew, and since this is an essay I will attempt to focus on the themes that has been presented during the first three days of Holy Week. What are those themes?

- The unproductive Fig Tree, Israel and the unproductive Church, will be cursed.
- Israel became idolatrous as they worshipped false images of foreign gods and false images of the Messiah; the unproductive Church is likewise guilty by worshipping false images of foreign ideas such as Modernism with its false images of Jesus)
- It is not enough to be invited to the wedding banquet, one must attend. Israel was the invited guest who was too busy to accept the King's invitation to His Son's wedding. The Church was formed when the King's servants went out to the highways and byways and brought in both good and bad. But it is also not enough to attend one must also be properly attired in faith and holiness, and bear fruit in keeping with repentance (Matt 3:8).

- All of the Jews of Israel were held responsible for not recognizing the Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, however their false shepherds were held to a greater accountability. God too will hold us responsible for our response to His call, but just as prophesized by Ezekiel and manifested in the judgment of Jerusalem in 70 AD, so too will false shepherds in the Church be held to a greater account since it was given to them the responsibility to prepare a Bride “holy and without blemish.”

It is through this lens that we will examine the Olivet Discourse. To be sure, there are other “lens” by which the Olivet Discourse can be interpreted; I have chosen to keep to the themes discussed from Palm Sunday through Holy Tuesday because I believe it is the most relevant lens for the times in which we are living. If you believe that the Church is facing an unprecedented crisis, then I also believe that reading chapter twenty four of Matthew through the lens of the themes above will give you a new sense of urgency to pray for the Church and her shepherds.

### **Why Don't Shepherds Teach Eschatology?**

There are undoubtedly many reasons why shepherds do not teach eschatology; I'll just list off a possible few:

- They don't believe Jesus is returning.
- They would prefer that Jesus not return, or at least not any time soon.
- They don't want to upset the sheep in the pews.
- They don't want to sound like “End of the World” crackpots.
- They don't know anything about it.
- They're afraid they'll get it wrong, after all, there are so many conflicting ideas about it.

As a result of shepherds rarely teaching eschatology (except in Charismatic and Evangelical churches) the sheep often never get to appreciate the beauty of the entire story arc from its beginning in Genesis to its fulfillment in the Apocalypse (Book of Revelation); and that, in my opinion, is a terrible shame. This story has an awesome ending.

### **So Why am I Doing It?**

The reason I'm interested in the eschatology is because I want to take a peek at the end of the story; in fact, I believe that Jesus wants to give us a peek into the last chapter; if He didn't then He wouldn't have bothered to discuss this in such detail. The other reason I will be discussing this topic is because the shepherds in my Church (the Roman Catholic Church) do not, and I believe it is just too important not to acquaint one's self with some of the ideas that will be presented here. What I will be suggesting is an eschatological “hypothesis,” that is a conditional thesis in need of verification. Don't take my word for it, perform your own due diligence; testing it by confirming if the ideas presented in the hypothesis are coherent with Scripture, Tradition, and Magisterial teaching (such as the Catechism of the Catholic Church). The rationale behind this eschatological hypothesis is based upon the following assumptions:

1. Jesus wants us to be watchful and prepared for His return.

*<sup>42</sup> Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. <sup>43</sup> But know this, that if the householder had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have watched and would not have let his house be broken into. <sup>44</sup> Therefore you also must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect. (Matt 24:42-44)*

2. Because of this, Jesus was not cryptic or obscure in His response to the disciples' question about His return; as such it shouldn't be necessary to have multiple degrees in Scripture, Theology, Semitic languages and so forth to understand at least the gist of what Jesus was teaching (although it wouldn't hurt).

The biblical Word is at work speaking universally, in time and space, to all humanity. If “the words of God...are like human language” (Dei Verbum, n.13), it is so that they may be understood by all. They must not remain distant, “too mysterious and remote for you.... For the word is very near to you, already in your mouths and in your hearts; you have only to carry it out.” (Deut 30:11-14) [from The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church by the Pontifical Biblical Commission, 1993, pp.23]

3. Jesus answered all three of the questions His disciples asked Him, this means that when Jesus described these events in the Olivet Discourse they were all in the “future” relative to the disciples, but to us 2000 year later, some of these events are in the past, while some of them are in the future still waiting to be fulfilled.

4. Hence, my approach is neither preteristic, nor is it futuristic, but best described as “polyvalent.” I borrowed this term from my years as a chemistry teacher.

5. When interpreting Scripture I believe that the primary sense of Scripture is literal while recognizing that the spiritual senses of Scripture are embedded into and dependent upon the literal sense.

According to an ancient tradition, one can distinguish between two senses of Scripture: the literal and the spiritual, the latter being subdivided into the allegorical, moral and anagogical senses. The profound concordance of the four senses guarantees all its richness to the living reading of Scripture in the Church. (CCC 115)

The literal sense is the meaning conveyed by the words of Scripture and discovered by exegesis, following the rules of sound interpretation: "All other senses of Sacred Scripture are based on the literal." (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, 1,10, *ad 1*) (CCC 116)

6. God continues to honor His Covenants with the Jewish people. Jews and Christians have been following parallel paths through history, but as the "end" approaches these paths will begin to converge as the former awaits the coming of their Messiah, while the latter the Return of their Savior and Lord.

The glorious Messiah's coming is suspended at every moment of history until his recognition by "all Israel", for "a hardening has come upon part of Israel" in their "unbelief" toward Jesus. St. Peter says to the Jews of Jerusalem after Pentecost: "Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for establishing all that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old." St. Paul echoes him: "For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?" The "full inclusion" of the Jews in the Messiah's salvation, in the wake of "the full number of the Gentiles", will enable the People of God to achieve "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ", in which "God may be all in all." (CCC, 674)

7. The Church will suffer a final testing (the Tribulations) as these chastisements will serve to purify the Bride before the Wedding Supper of the Lamb.

Before Christ's second coming the Church must pass through a final trial that will shake the faith of many believers. The persecution that accompanies her pilgrimage on earth will unveil the "mystery of iniquity" in the form of a religious deception offering men an apparent solution to their problems at the price of apostasy from the truth. The supreme religious deception is that of the Antichrist, a pseudo-messianism by which man glorifies himself in place of God and of his Messiah come in the flesh. (CCC, 675)

## The Olivet Discourse

### Prelude to the Olivet Discourse

*He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury;<sup>2</sup> and he saw a poor widow put in two copper coins.<sup>3</sup> And he said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them;<sup>4</sup> for they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all the living that she had.” (Luke 21:1-4)*

*And as he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, “Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!”<sup>2</sup> And Jesus said to him, “Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another, that will not be thrown down.” (Mark 13:1-2)*

On Holy Tuesday, Jesus spoke these final words to the Scribes and the Pharisees,

*<sup>37</sup> “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!<sup>38</sup> Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate. (Matt 23:37-38)*

Jesus warned the Scribes and Pharisees that their house, the Temple, would be “forsaken and desolate” because of their unfaithfulness and their rejection of Him. Jesus clarified this further when He explained to his disciples that the Temple would be completely destroyed, “There will not be left here one stone upon another.” Jesus had given the religious leadership of Israel ample warning, but it went unheeded.

God desires all men to be saved (1Tim 2:4), but He will not impose His will over our own, but He does warn us ahead of time of the consequence of willfulness. This is one of the primary tasks of the prophet, and purpose of prophecy.

*Surely the Lord God does nothing, without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets. (Amos 3:7)*

God is speaking to His Church today through His Scripture. Are the Shepherds of the Church boldly proclaiming to their flocks the warning Jesus spoke to the Scribes and Pharisees or are they missing the message too? This question takes on much greater importance if we understand that the Olivet Discourse is not just a prophesy of something that has already occurred (the position of preterism), but also of things yet to come (futurism).

### Signs of the End of the Age

*<sup>3</sup> As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?”*

The disciples just asked Jesus three questions, second and third questions are linked:

1. “When will this be?” referring to the destruction of the Temple.
2. “What will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?”

All of these questions were futuristic when the disciples asked them. The first question, “when will these things be?” was referring to the destruction of the Temple. This was fulfilled within the lifetime of some of the disciples as it occurred with the fall and destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 AD. From our perspective 2000 years later Jesus’ answer to this question could be interpreted preteristically, that is, its fulfillment has already occurred. Does this mean that the Olivet Discourse has no further relevance to the Church or to the Jewish people? Certainly not, as Jesus also answered the disciples second question which has not been fulfilled. Furthermore, when Jesus speaks of the Temple, a bit later in the Olivet Discourse, He is likely speaking not only of the Second Temple, but also of a future Third Temple. We’ll discuss this when we get to these verses.

<sup>4</sup> *And Jesus answered them, "Take heed that no one leads you astray. <sup>5</sup> For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray.*

Jesus prefaces His answers to the disciples' "when" and "what" questions with a "who" response. Jesus warns them to let no one lead them astray. Who are these that lead astray? Some of these deceivers are those who come in Jesus' name, but they do not teach the authentic Gospel because they are false shepherds. There are also others who lead astray by claiming to be the Christ, the "Anointed One," who will offer to humanity a pseudo-Christianity, a resurrection without the cross, a church without the Holy Spirit, and a kingdom in this world.

Through the centuries the Church has taken this warning very seriously as she held Ecumenical Councils to address false shepherds and their teachings. Is the Church as diligent now as She was in former centuries or is She too concerned with accommodating the Modern world? Are the sheep prepared to stand firm in the faith even during the great tribulations they must face in the times that Jesus described in the Olivet Discourse?

*Be watchful, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong.* (1Cor 13:16)

<sup>6</sup> *And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not alarmed; for this must take place, but the end is not yet. <sup>7</sup> For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places: <sup>8</sup> all this is but the beginning of the sufferings.* (Matt 24:3-8)

*"all of these is but the beginning of the sufferings."* (Matt 24:3-8)

The New American Bible Revised Edition translates this verse as:

*"All these are the beginning of the labor pains."*

Rabbinic literature dating back to the Babylonian Talmud (written during the Babylonian Captivity) discussed the time before the coming of the Messiah specifically in terms of labor or "birth pains." The Orthodox Jewish Bible renders this same verse as follows:

***But all these things are but the beginning of the Chevlei [Moshiach].***

*Chevlei Moshiach* has been translated as "birth pains of the Messiah" and it is used in Rabbinic literature to describe a time of troubles and suffering before the coming of the Messiah. Rabbi J. Immanuel Schochet referenced both the Talmud and the Midrash when describing the *Chevlei Moshiach*:

"Most of these conditions are quite disturbing, clearly displaying a situation of the very 'bottom of the pit.' One major source describes the world-condition in those days as follows: increase in insolence and impudence; oppressing inflation; unbridled irresponsibility on the part of authorities; centers of learning will turn into bawdy houses; wars; many destitutes begging, with none to pity them; wisdom shall be putrid; the pious shall be despised; truth will be abandoned; the young will insult the old; family-breakup with mutual recriminations; impudent leadership.

'Other sources add: lack of scholars; succession of troubles and evil decrees; famines; mutual denunciations; epidemics of terrible diseases; poverty and scarcity; cursing and blaspheming; international confrontations nations provoking and fighting each other. In short, it will be a time of suffering that will make it look as if G-d were asleep. These are the birthpangs of Mashiach, bearable only in anticipation of the bliss that follows them.' [([https://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/100900/jewish/The-Time-Before-Mashiach.htm](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/100900/jewish/The-Time-Before-Mashiach.htm))]

The Rabbinic tradition regarding *Chevlei Moshiach* was rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures which made it clear that the time preceding the coming of the Messiah would be a time of

tribulation.

*Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in travail has brought forth; then the rest of his brethren shall return to the people of Israel. <sup>4</sup> And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. (Micah 5:3-4)*

*Wail, for the day of the LORD is near; as destruction from the Almighty it will come! <sup>7</sup> Therefore all hands will be feeble, and every man's heart will melt, <sup>8</sup> and they will be dismayed. Pangs and agony will seize them; they will be in anguish like a woman in travail. They will look aghast at one another; their faces will be aflame. (Isaiah 13:6-8)*

There are many other such scriptures not only in the Hebrew Bible, but also in the New Testament that compare the time before the coming of the Messiah as a woman in labor.

*But as to the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need to have anything written to you. <sup>2</sup> For you yourselves know well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. <sup>3</sup> When people say, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as travail comes upon a woman with child, and there will be no escape. (1Thess 5:1-3)*

But it is not just humanity that will be experiencing the birth pangs of the Messiah, but creation as well.

*<sup>18</sup> I consider that the sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed for us. <sup>19</sup> For creation awaits with eager expectation the revelation of the children of God; <sup>20</sup> for creation was made subject to futility, not of its own accord but because of the one who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup> that creation itself would be set free from slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God. <sup>22</sup> We know that all creation is groaning in labor pains even until now; <sup>23</sup> and not only that, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, we also groan within ourselves as we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. (Rom 8:18-23)*

There is another important prophetic scripture regarding the coming of the Messiah and a woman experiencing birth pangs and that is the famous passage regarding a "Woman clothed with the Sun" from the Book of Revelations. I will discuss this passage later in a reflection of the same name. In all of the scriptures above and the discussion of Rabbinic tradition we observe a strong linkage between the coming of the Messiah and birth pangs. There is an important lesson we can learn from this:

- Birth pangs can come on "suddenly" and unexpectedly so a woman must be able to recognize the early signs that her delivery is imminent.
- A woman must prepare ahead of time physically, psychologically, and spiritually for this event.
- A woman surrounds herself with family, friends, and professionals that will support her through the birth pangs.
- The birth pangs are a "tribulation" which a woman embraces by force of will, fortitude, and love and through an act of creative suffering she brings a new being into the world, a child.
- And in her fiat to motherhood she too becomes a new being, a mother.

This is what Jesus is telling His disciples and the Church. He will tell them to "endure to the end" because if we do we too will become a new being—a Bride, and a Mother.

## Persecutions Foretold

<sup>9</sup> *“Then they will deliver you up to tribulation, and put you to death; and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake. <sup>10</sup> And then many will fall away, and betray one another, and hate one another. <sup>11</sup> And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray.*

Christianity was born in tribulation and persecution. Its founder, Jesus Christ, was crucified (and resurrected), His apostles were all martyred except for John the Beloved, and for two and a half centuries the fledgling Church suffered horrific persecution by the Romans until the Emperor Constantine decriminalized the Faith in 313 with the Edict of Milan. Through the centuries Christianity suffered persecution with the rise of Islam in the Middle East, and as her missionaries pressed into foreign lands to spread the Gospel they and their converts were often met with resistance and martyrdom. The twentieth century was especially brutal to Christians with the rise of Communism and Fascism, yet as terrible as the persecution was under these oppressive regimes the greatest threat to the Church came not from the sword of the state, or anti-Christian zealots, but from an idea—Modernism.

Modernism in the West, with its rejection of God and the Revealed and Natural Law, sought to empower man to recreate himself into the image of his desires. Man was “liberated” from the struggle against the flesh and the pursuit of the Transcendent and could now focus his energies on satisfying his desires while the Modernist Collective validated and guaranteed his right to do so. By the early 21<sup>st</sup> century the flame of the Church, which had once burned brightly in the West was nothing but a smoldering wick. The Church unexpectedly found herself being persecuted by the very civilization that she helped to birth. Many left the Church, while others, especially in the hierarchy, sought “accommodation” with the Modernity and in doing so have compromised the authenticity of the Faith. Those that clung to the “faith once delivered to the saints” now find themselves marginalized, opposed and even persecuted, not only by the secular culture, but also by the Modernist Church.

After twenty centuries of preserving Her doctrines against heresy, the Church now finds herself in the greatest challenge she has ever faced, and it is not from without, but from within. As those within the Church sought to accommodate the world they allowed the tenants of Modernism (skepticism, relativism, anti-intellectualism, and scientism) to despoil the Good, the True, and the Beautiful which had been entrusted to her. Sexual immorality, even against children and adolescents, was winked at and covered up. The Truth of the Faith necessary for the salvation of souls was traded for the approval of men. The Beauty of the Church, which had elevated the human mind and heart towards the universal and eternal, has devolved into the common place and at worse, the demonic and the hideous. In most case, the “false prophets (shepherds) “lead the Church away” from the Good, the True, and the Beautiful, not by heresy, but by a relentless “equivocation.”

“Formal and clear heresy acts like a dagger. Equivocation acts like a slow poison. Heresy attacks a precise article of dogma. Equivocation undermines the habitus of faith and thus weakens all dogmas. One becomes a formal heretic only by willing it. Equivocation instead is able to demolish the faith of a man unbeknownst to him. Heresy affirms what dogma denies or denies what it affirms. Equivocation destroys the faith just as radically, by refraining from either affirming or denying, by turning revealed certainty into personal opinion.” [Abbé Raymond Dulac, *Le droit de la messe romaine* (Versailles: Publications du Courrier de Rome, 2018) p. 252.]

The Church of Equivocation is more interested in being married to the world than becoming the Bride of Christ. If that were not true then she would be teaching the “truth in love” rather than duplicitousness. “Many will fall away,” but a greater judgment will befall the “false prophets” (shepherds) who taught the vagaries of equivocation rather than the “truth in love.”

<sup>12</sup> *And because wickedness is multiplied, most men's love will grow cold.*

This verse is frequently translated as:

*and because of the abounding of the lawlessness, the love of the many shall become cold;*  
(Young's Literal Translation)

Wickedness (or iniquity) and lawlessness appear to be interchangeable. From the Aramaic text the term is mostly translated as "evil." In the Hebrew, the transliterated word, *mufkarut*, is taken as "lawlessness" and the Greek, ἀνομίαν (or transliterated as, *anomia*) is translated into English as "violation of law or wickedness." Thus, the two English terms "wickedness" and "lawlessness" seems to be appropriate. This is especially true if we remember that Jesus was speaking to His Jewish disciples whose very culture was based upon Torah, or the Law of God. For the Jewish people their very view of the universe was in the context of Torah. Torah, or what Catholics might call the Eternal Law includes the entirety of the Law, the Revealed Law, the Physical Laws that govern the universe, and the Natural Law which is the ontological and moral order that God has built into His creation. For the Jewish people actions contrary to Torah were inherently wicked since to violate the created order of the universe is rebellion against the Creator.

Modernism has produced the lawlessness which has pervaded the West and the Church and it constitutes the "spirit of the age" which has defined the last fifty years. It is a rejection of the laws of God, of His creation, and of those man-made laws that have been posited in accordance with God and Nature. It was from this spirit that the Church delivered us as Paul explained to Ephesians:

*And you he made alive, when you were dead through the trespasses and sins<sup>2</sup> in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.<sup>3</sup> Among these we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of body and mind, and so we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. (Eph 2:1-3)*

Yet Modernists, both outside and inside the Church, promised that lawlessness would be the path to actualization and a freedom to become our own creator, to will ourselves into the "image" of our choosing, to define for ourselves what is good, and true, and beautiful, to... "call evil good, and good evil, [and] change darkness to light, and light into darkness, [and] change bitter to sweet, and sweet into bitter!" (Isa 5:20). These then became the "sons of disobedience," and their father is the devil. We are returning once again to a "yoke of slavery." (Gal 5:1) This is the "smoke of Satan" that has entered the Church:

"... We would say that, through some mysterious crack—no, it's not mysterious; through some crack, the smoke of Satan has entered the Church of God. There is doubt, uncertainty, problems, unrest, dissatisfaction, confrontation.... The Church is no longer trusted." (Pope Paul IV, 1972)

Doubt, uncertainty, problems, unrest, dissatisfaction, confrontations, and distrust are the fruits of lawlessness and it is within this climate that "most men's love grows cold," or as a more poetic translation expresses, "the love of many waxes cold." It's pretty obvious really; consider family life. It is the job of the parents to create a climate that fosters love and mutual respect, and this can only occur when there is an order founded on God Word. This begins with the parents.

<sup>21</sup> *Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.* <sup>22</sup> *Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord.* <sup>23</sup> *For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.* <sup>24</sup> *As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands.* <sup>25</sup> *Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, (Eph 5:21-25)*

Modernism, with its radical egalitarianism which equates equality with homogeneity, has rebelled against God's order in the family. When the Church accepts the modernist's

perspective it is because they worship a false image of Christ and not the real Christ. Why have they done this? It is because they no longer want to be conformed to the image of the Son who....

*<sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. (Phil 2:6-8)*

When husbands and shepherds empty themselves as Christ did and take the form of a servant there will be the proper order in the family and the Church, and love will flourish. But unfortunately, this is not the case in many Christian families nor is it being manifested in many of our churches, especially those influenced by Modernism. It is also necessary that the children and sheep respond accordingly to the law of God.

*Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God gives you. (Exo 20:12)*

This is the order as expressed by the Divine and Natural law, which when disregarded results in lawlessness and the waxing cold of the love that is to be in the family and in the Church.

**<sup>13</sup> But he who endures to the end will be saved. (Matt 24:13)**

Endure what? I'm pretty sure we need to take this in the context of what came before, that is, persecution by the world, the betrayal of brethren, and from the lawlessness and iniquity which will be the hallmark of the end of the age. Suffering is a prelude to the revealing of the "mystery of iniquity," that is, the "man of sin" also known as the "man of lawlessness." His presence is preceded by and contiguous with another mystery, the mystery of suffering. Generations in the past understood suffering better than we do today; it was recognized as a part of life, to be avoided if possible, but ultimately inevitable part of life to be endured with dignity, and courage. My parents' generation exemplified this ethos as they endured the Great Depression and fought the great evils of National Socialism and Imperial Japan in World War II. Now, when the going gets tough we distract ourselves, perhaps go shopping, or deaden ourselves through legal and illegal drugs, and if things get really bad there is also the final solution of suicide or euthanasia. As Christians we should know better. Our Faith has given us the context to understand suffering, and more importantly Christ has given us the "privilege" to share in His cross for the salvation of His Church and the world.

We are going to be studying the Pascal Mystery of Christ's suffering and our redemption when we begin our discussion of the Triduum, that is, Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday. Shortly after Peter's declaration that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God, our Lord explained to His disciples that He would...

*"...suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." (Matt 16:21)*

Jesus continued by telling them that to be His disciples they too must suffer like Him.

*"If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. <sup>25</sup> For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. (Matt 16:24-25)*

Some might protest, "Jesus suffered so that we don't have to?" Sorry, but this just isn't true, and there are literally dozens of scriptures that validate this. Some of the scriptures makes it clear that the believer can receive moral and spiritual benefits when suffering for Christ:

<sup>3</sup> More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, <sup>4</sup> and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, <sup>5</sup> and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. (Rom 5:3-5)

There is, however, an even a greater blessing in the mystery of suffering, and that is participating with Christ's suffering on behalf of another, and especially the Church.

*Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, (Col 1:24)*

What could possibly be lacking in the redemptive power of Christ's suffering and death? Nothing, of course, nothing except for its application in the lives of people which is dependent upon our free will acceptance and submission to it. Can this be achieved by other means? Yes, of course, such as through prayer and fasting. We can do this and should do this frequently. Suffering is a special type of prayer if it is in participation with Christ suffering especially when it is done for the salvation of souls and "for the sake of his body, that is, the Church."

My father did not know the Scriptures by chapters and verses, but he did understand suffering in the context of his Catholic worldview. "Offer it up," was one of my dad's favorite sayings whenever I was in pain because I was sick or injured from an accident, disappointed about how I did in school, or heartbroken because a girl broke up with me. He was firmly convinced that even these minor sufferings, could become a grace when given to Jesus and directed towards some person or some cause. I quit doing that when I left the Catholic Church in my early twenties. Now that I'm back (for many years now) I have tried to readopt that "offering it up" ethos of "employing" my suffering for the service of some good which according to my Dad (and I'm sure he was right about this) only works when it is done without whining and complaining.

Why is this important here in the Olivet Discourse when Jesus is discussing the signs of His coming and of the end of the age? Because there will be suffering during this time and Christians need to understand that it must be endured, not only for their own salvation, but that of the Church and the world.

***<sup>14</sup> And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come. (Matt 24:14)***

The above scripture reminds me of the Great Commission that Jesus gave to the disciples just before His ascension into heaven:

*<sup>16</sup> Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. <sup>17</sup> And when they saw him they worshiped him; but some doubted. <sup>18</sup> And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." (Matt 28:16-20)*

In the first passage (Matt 24:14) from the Olivet Discourse Jesus is speaking prophetically of a future fact, that is, that the "gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all the nations." The second passage (Matt 28-20), Jesus is commissioning His disciples, and all those who follow them, to "make disciples of all nations." Is there a fundamental difference between the two? Lately, some seem to think so. Those that make this distinction perceive a fundamental difference between "preaching" and "making disciples," which they equate with evangelism, and proselytism respectively. Yet, there is no legitimate distinction between them give the fact that the purpose of evangelization is to make converts, that is, a proselyte (a "newcomer"). Yet, for those who make this distinction they'll claim that evangelization is acceptable while proselytism is not. This is a classic example of a "distinction without a difference," claiming that there is a distinction between two words or phrases when there is not.

A “distinction without a difference” is known as a “logical fallacy” because the two terms or phrases cited are generally accepted as equivalent, yet the one who is arguing for distinction claims that they are not. Usually a logical fallacy is made to create confusion or ambiguity, although sometimes it might be made accidentally because of ignorance or a lack of linguistic precision. As a result of this unresolvable paradox confusion and ambiguity arises in the mind, especially when the logical fallacy is proposed by a trusted authority. The purpose for creating confusion and ambiguity is to deconstruct the meaning of “words,” and thereby the ideas that they represent so that they can be reconstructed with new meanings.

Heretofore Evangelism and Proselytism meant the same thing, to make “new disciples” of Christ. Now, modernist Christian hierarchs are telling us that proselytism is bad and that evangelism is good. Proselytism is presented as coldly calculated, and oriented towards a false objective as if it were a marketing campaign targeting individuals not out of love or concern for them but to manipulate them into buying a product or perhaps voting for a particular candidate for political office. Evangelism, on the other hand, is focused on dialogue and its objective is to promote mutual understanding. The problem with this artificial distinction is that it makes the objective of evangelism “dialogue and understanding” as an end to itself rather than the means by which people are brought into a relationship with Jesus Christ. Jesus did not commission His Church to *Go therefore and dialogue with of all nations*, he told them to *make disciples of all nations*. To suggest this is to promote a false dichotomy. A faithful Christian believes that Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life and that no man comes to the Father except through Him; so yes, they keep their eyes on the prize of making disciples not only out of love for Christ, but also for the love of every person they introduce to Him.

Dialogue and mutual understand and respect is good, salvation and an eternal life with Christ are infinitely better. Isn't this obvious? Apparently not, because these same modernist Christians who have created a “distinction without a difference” in regard to Evangelism and Proselytism have also created “no distinction when there is a difference” in regards to salvation as well as many other issues central to Christianity. The “Document on Human Fraternity” (excerpted below) signed by Pope Francis and Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Mosque is just such an example of a logical fallacy that any faithful Catholic or Muslim would, by necessity, have to reject:

“Freedom is a right of every person: each individual enjoys the freedom of belief, thought, expression and action. The pluralism and diversity of religions, color, sex, race and language are willed by God in His wisdom, through which He created human being. This divine wisdom is the source from which the right to freedom of belief and the freedom to be different derives.”

If God wills the diversity of religion, then His justice must accommodate all of those religions as valid for salvation, when lived according to their precepts. However, even a cursory understanding of comparative religions will leave one with the inescapable conclusion that these religions hold many contradictory beliefs with respect to one another. To conclude otherwise would be to suggest that there is “no distinction when there is a difference.” This is the secularist Modernist's conclusion with respect to religion, that is, they are all the same and all equally invalid. The only difference between the secularist and the Christian Modernist chooses to believe that all of these religions are still valid in spite of the contradictions.

If all religions are equally valid then it stands to reason that the mission and object of evangelism should be about dialogue, mutual understanding and respect since “all roads lead to heaven” anyway. Is there any wonder then that the Pope recently exclaimed, “proselytism is solemn nonsense, it makes no sense.” This, however, is NOT the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. The first Pope, Saint Peter, stated this explicitly when he was speaking to the Jews of Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost:

*There is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved. (Acts 4:12)*

If Scripture is to be believed then there is NO name other than Jesus by which we are saved, then it further stands to reason that God does NOT actively (positively) will all religions (although like many things after the Fall He passively wills/permits them). It also logically follows that Christians need to Evangelize/Proselytize all nations making them disciples while baptizing in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Who benefits from all of this verbal deconstruction, confusion, and reconstruction of the language of the faith? Satan and his minions. Consider the verse that follows the one we've been discussing:

*<sup>14</sup> And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; **and then the end will come.***

Satan knows he has been judged and the execution of this judgment will occur when "the end comes." By promoting confusion with respect to the Great Commission of evangelization Satan not only postpones the execution of his judgment, but he also diminishes Christ's victory by thwarting the application of salvation in the lives of those who are not proselytized.

Modernist's corruption of language, brought about by the skepticism, relativism, anti-intellectualism, and scientism, has and will continue to create an environment hostile to evangelism. This hostility is criminalizing Christian evangelism in the Public Square even in the West. The Modernist Church will support this persecution even against their own (see verses 10 and 11). If Christians find it to be a challenge to spread the Gospel of the Kingdom now, just wait, it is going to get a whole lot worse when their own Church no longer supports them.

### **The Desolating Sacrilege**

*<sup>15</sup> "So when you see the desolating sacrilege spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand),<sup>16</sup> then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains;<sup>17</sup> let him who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house;<sup>18</sup> and let him who is in the field not turn back to take his mantle.<sup>19</sup> And alas for those who are with child and for those who give suck in those days!<sup>20</sup> Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a sabbath.<sup>21</sup> For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be.<sup>22</sup> And if those days had not been shortened, no human being would be saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.<sup>23</sup> Then if any one says to you, 'Lo, here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' do not believe it.<sup>24</sup> For false Christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.<sup>25</sup> Lo, I have told you beforehand.<sup>26</sup> So, if they say to you, 'Lo, he is in the wilderness,' do not go out; if they say, 'Lo, he is in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. (Matt 24:15-26)*

### **The Abomination of Desolation**

Jesus has been answering the disciples questions,

*"Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming, and of the close of the age?"*

It looks like He is now finally addressing the issue of the destruction of the Temple as well as getting a bit more specific regarding the "signs," after all "wars, and rumors of wars" and earthquakes, and persecutions have been with us pretty much continuously for the past two thousands years and even before Jesus spoke these words. Now, Jesus is telling His disciples to watch for a very specific sign, "the desolating sacrilege" (often referred to as the "abomination of desolation) "standing in the holy place" and He references the Book of Daniel to clarify exactly what He is referring to. So just what is the "abomination of desolation?"

The passage from the Book of Daniel that Jesus was referring to is from chapter nine verse twenty seven:

***And he shall confirm the covenant with many, in one week: and in the half of the week the victim and the sacrifice shall fall: and there shall be in the temple the abomination of desolation: and the desolation shall continue even to the consummation, and to the end.***  
(Dan 9:27, Douay-Rheims 1899)

It is generally agreed by Bible scholars that the “abomination of desolation” refers to the placement of idol(s) in the holy place (Holy of Holies) in the Temple. The individual responsible for “desolating sacrifice” is also the one who “shall confirm the covenant” and puts an end to the Temple sacrifice. Who is this individual? Saint Paul identifies him as “the man of sin” or the “man of lawlessness.” Will discuss this momentarily, but first lets examine the different opinions regarding this event with respect to it be a sign of the “end of the age.”

Some Christian scholars (Preterists) believe that the “abomination of desolation,” and the tribulations which followed, are associated with the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD. Other scholars (Futurists) disagree believing that Jesus’ reference to the “abomination of desolation” is for a future end-time event. As I have discussed previously my position on scripture, and particularly prophecy, is that they can be “polyvalent” having multiple meaning and fulfillments. Is it possible that an “abomination of desolation” occurred during the first century AD? Yes, although there is no record of pagan idols having been brought into the Temple prior to or during the destruction of the Temple. Those that support this theory refer to the statues of Zeus and the emperor Hadrian that were erected on the Temple Mount sometime after the Temple was destroyed. Does this qualify? Some of the Church Fathers, including Saint Augustine thought so. There is also the support of history. According to tradition most of the Christians in Jerusalem fled the city and found safety in the city of Pella in the Transjordan. The Olivet Discourse as recorded in Luke includes the verse:

***“But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near.”*** (Luke 21: 20)

Nevertheless, even if the destruction of Jerusalem described by Jesus in His Olivet Discourse does coincide with the events that occurred in 70 AD it does not preclude additional fulfillments in the future. Many Futurists, especially Evangelicals and Pentecostals believe that in the near future the Jews of Israel will rebuild the Temple on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem fulfilling the prophecies of Ezekiel that we have discussed earlier. This will be a prelude to an “abomination of desolation” which itself will be followed by the Great Tribulations that Jesus spoke of in Matt 24:21. Do I think this is possible? Yes. It is an interesting theory and should not be dismissed.

I also believe that there are additional fulfillments of the Olivet Discourse with respect to the “abomination of desolation.” I have discussed previously in the earlier reflections of Holy Monday and Holy Tuesday I hypothesized that the Third Temple prophesied in Ezekiel could also be speaking of the Church. In this case, the “abomination of desolation” could also take place not only in the Third Jewish Temple, but also within the Christian Church, including my own Roman Catholic Church. Have there been idols brought into our Church? Yes, the idols of Modernism with its false images of God, His Son, and humankind. If this is true then we may be witnessing the “abomination of desolation” before our eyes.

It must be remembered that the Church, the Third Temple, is itself made up of living stones which are the Body of Christ. Each of us is the temple of the Holy Spirit that dwells in our hearts. Our heart is the Holy of Holies where the Spirit of Christ dwells within us. Do we reverence our Lord in our hearts and minds or do we profane these holy places within ourselves by setting up idols to false gods, most especially the god of Self. Is this another “abomination of desolation?” The first commandment commands us that we serve no other God but Him:

<sup>3</sup>**“You shall have no other gods before me.**

<sup>4</sup>**“You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is**

**in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; <sup>5</sup> you shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, (Exo 20:3-4)**

As mentioned earlier Saint Paul identifies the individual who “stands within the holy place” (Temple) as the “man of sin” or “lawlessness.”

**<sup>3</sup> Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of perdition, <sup>4</sup> who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. <sup>5</sup> Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you this? <sup>6</sup> And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. <sup>7</sup> For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. <sup>8</sup> And then the lawless one will be revealed, (2Thess 2:3-8)**

That “day” that Saint Paul is referring to in verse 3 in the “day of the Lord,” that is the Return of Jesus Christ in Glory. The Church teaches that there will be such an individual that comes before the return of Christ:

*“Before Christ's second coming the Church must pass through a final trial that will shake the faith of many believers. The persecution that accompanies her pilgrimage on earth<sup>574</sup> will unveil the "mystery of iniquity" in the form of a religious deception offering men an apparent solution to their problems at the price of apostasy from the truth. The supreme religious deception is that of the Antichrist, a pseudo-messianism by which man glorifies himself in place of God and of his Messiah come in the flesh.” (CCC 675)*

Is the “man of lawlessness” here? I don’t know. Maybe. What I do know and believe is “the mystery of lawlessness (iniquity) is already at work.” Where is the mystery operating? Unfortunately in me every time I choose to do my will over His, refuse to pick up my cross and follow Him, when I am not bold to proclaim the Gospel, and do not love as He loves.

### **The Great Tribulations**

**<sup>21</sup> For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. <sup>22</sup> And if those days had not been shortened, no human being would be saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened. (Matt 24:21-22)**

It seems to me that verse 21 makes it pretty difficult to support the Preterist’s position that the entirety of Matthew 24 was fulfilled with the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD. As terrible as that was I don’t see how it could qualify as the greatest tribulation to befall humanity from the beginning of the world until now or ever will be. There can be little doubt, therefore, that when Jesus is speaking of the “mystery of iniquity,” the “abomination of desolation,” and the “great tribulations” which follow it is all in the context of signs of His return. And in regard to these tribulation that have yet to befall upon the world, Jesus adds that they are so great they actually pose an existential threat to the entire human race, but they will be cut short for the sake of the Church.

**<sup>23</sup> Then if any one says to you, ‘Lo, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There he is!’ do not believe it. <sup>24</sup> For false Christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. (Matt 24:23-24)**

Jesus warned His disciples earlier in the Olivet Discourse about false prophets and false Christs, but now He is adding that these “end time” deceivers will possess the ability to perform “great signs and wonders” the consequence of which will be to lead many astray. It is because of the immense significance of these events and the dire consequence of apostasy that Jesus explicitly warns His disciples in advance so that they might not be deceived.

*Lo, I have told you beforehand. <sup>26</sup> So, if they say to you, 'Lo, he is in the wilderness,' do not go out; if they say, 'Lo, he is in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. (Matt 24:25-26)*

Where, therefore, are the “watchmen on the walls” reading the signs of the times?

*<sup>54</sup> He also said to the multitudes, “When you see a cloud rising in the west, you say at once, ‘A shower is coming’; and so it happens. <sup>55</sup> And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, ‘There will be scorching heat’; and it happens. <sup>56</sup> You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky; but why do you not know how to interpret the present time? (Luke 12:54-56)*

And as we shall read shortly when Jesus teaches the parable of the ten virgins He commands us to be watchful. Why? So that we might be prepared. As I have written earlier, “To be forewarned is to be forearmed.” Christians in every time and circumstances are to be armed, but even more so during the “end times.”

*<sup>10</sup> Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. <sup>11</sup> Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. <sup>12</sup> For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. <sup>13</sup> Therefore take the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. <sup>14</sup> Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, <sup>15</sup> and having shod your feet with the equipment of the gospel of peace; <sup>16</sup> above all taking the shield of faith, with which you can quench all the flaming darts of the evil one. <sup>17</sup> And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. <sup>18</sup> Pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, (Eph 6:10-18)*

What if we were living in the “end times?” I would want to know what the “great signs and wonders” were so I could prayerfully prepare for the deceptions that Satan has prepared against us. If I were a shepherd I would want to know so that I could prepare my sheep so that false christs and prophets would not deceive them. Some might dismiss my concern; they might claim that no one can know when the “end times” will be so why worry about it, or they might presume that they couldn’t possibly be deceived, they may rely on their shepherds to keep them from being lead astray, or they might subscribed to the doctrine of “eternally security” that states “once saved, eternally saved.” Even now we are living in a time of mass exodus from Christianity (in the West) and that’s without the “signs and wonders” from false christs and prophets. No one should be presumptuous regarding his or her salvation.

Given the times we are living in, end times or not, if I were a shepherd or a catechist I would have my sheep in Scripture, Tradition, and Theology and Philosophy Boot Camp. (Why Philosophy? It is not enough to know Scripture and Tradition one needs to know how to think precisely and accurately, but that’s another topic.)

Unfortunately, this is not happening in most places so it is up to everyone to prepare intellectually, spiritually (and yes, even materially) for the coming days not only for yourselves, but for your loved one and it begins only when we reject the assumption that the “end times” could never occur in our life time, and the presumption that we could not be deceived.

## **The Coming of the Son of Man**

*<sup>27</sup> For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of man.*

*<sup>28</sup> Wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together. <sup>29</sup> “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken; <sup>30</sup> then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory; <sup>31</sup> and he will*

*send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.* (Matt 24:27-31)

### **Lightning Comes From the East and Shines as far as the West**

No one will need to tell anyone where the Lord is, *‘Lo, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There he is!’*” On the “great and terrible day of the Lord” (Joel 2:31) all will see Him and know exactly who He is, the King of kings, and the Lord of lords. When the peoples of the earth see the Lord they will have very different reactions.

<sup>10</sup>*“And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of compassion and supplication, so that, when they look on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a first-born.* (Zech 12:10)

The Lord will pour out on the Jewish people a spirit of compassion and supplication. They will recognize Jesus, whom they have pierced and they shall mourn and repent and all of Israel will be saved.

<sup>25</sup>*Lest you be wise in your own conceits, I want you to understand this mystery, brethren: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles come in,*  
<sup>26</sup>*and so all Israel will be saved;* (Rom 11:25-26)

The Catechism of the Catholic Church also recognizes this understanding of the relationship to the *“sign of [His] coming and of the close of the age:”*

“The glorious Messiah's coming is suspended at every moment of history until his recognition by "all Israel", for "a hardening has come upon part of Israel" in their "unbelief" toward Jesus. St. Peter says to the Jews of Jerusalem after Pentecost: "Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for establishing all that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old." St. Paul echoes him: "For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?" The "full inclusion" of the Jews in the Messiah's salvation, in the wake of "the full number of the Gentiles", will enable the People of God to achieve "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ", in which "God may be all in all". (CCC 674)

Not everyone will respond with repentance when they see the Lord:

<sup>15</sup>*Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the generals and the rich and the strong, and every one, slave and free, hid in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains,*<sup>16</sup> *calling to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb;”*<sup>17</sup> *for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand before it?”* (Rev 6:15-17)

When does this happen? After the tribulations. Preceding the appearance of the Lord in Glory amazing things will happen, the *“sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.”* The Book of Revelation describes this just prior to the scripture above:

<sup>12</sup>*When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood,*<sup>13</sup> *and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale;*<sup>14</sup> *the sky vanished like a scroll that is rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.* (Rev 6:12-14)

Then the Lord appears,

*then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth*

*will mourn, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory;* (Matt 24:30)

Following this, something remarkable and prophetically controversial happens:

*<sup>31</sup> and he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.* (Matt 24:31)

This scripture has a parallel passage from the Book of Revelation:

*<sup>14</sup> Then I looked, and lo, a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand. <sup>15</sup> And another angel came out of the temple, calling with a loud voice to him who sat upon the cloud, "Put in your sickle, and reap, for the hour to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe." <sup>16</sup> So he who sat upon the cloud swung his sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped.* (Rev 14:14-16)

In some quarters of Christendom, what is being described in Matt 24:31 and Rev 14:14-16 is known as the Rapture, but that's a story for another time and another venue. (I plan to cover this topic in a series of essays under the title, *The Return of the Bridegroom*, which will be the third in a series, beginning with this collection, *Behold the Bridegroom*, and then followed by, *Come, Let Me Show You the Bride*).

### **The Lesson of the Fig Tree**

*<sup>32</sup> "From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. <sup>33</sup> So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates. <sup>34</sup> Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away till all these things take place. <sup>35</sup> Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.* (Matt 24:32-35)

This is our second encounter with the Fig Tree this Holy Week. Remember on Holy Monday morning Jesus left Bethany and on his way to Jerusalem He was hungry and encountered a fig tree:

*<sup>18</sup> In the morning, as he was returning to the city, he was hungry. <sup>19</sup> And seeing a fig tree by the wayside he went to it, and found nothing on it but leaves only. And he said to it, "May no fruit ever come from you again!" And the fig tree withered at once.* (Matt 21:18-19)

You may also remember that I wrote a short reflection on this encounter in which I said that this story harkens back to a parable Jesus told earlier in His ministry:

*<sup>6</sup> And he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. <sup>7</sup> And he said to the vinedresser, 'Lo, these three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down; why should it use up the ground?' <sup>8</sup> And he answered him, 'Let it alone, sir, this year also, till I dig about it and put on manure. <sup>9</sup> And if it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'" (Luke 13:6-9)*

In the Holy Monday reflection I connected Jesus' encounter with the fig tree with the parable He had told earlier:

"Many scripture scholars agree that the owner of the vineyard is God the Father looking for fruit from a barren Israel. Christ, the vinedresser pleads with the owner of the vineyard to spare the tree and that He will take special care of the tree in the hope that within a year's time it will bear fruit. Nevertheless, He will follow the instructions of the owner should the tree remain barren. This Holy Monday morning the year was up, the tree bore no figs, Jesus cursed the tree, *and the fig tree withered at once.*"

Jesus told the religious authorities on Holy Monday, “**Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruits of it.**” (Matt 21:43) On Holy Monday and Tuesday Jesus was telling the Scribes and the Pharisees that the “kingdom of God” was going to be taken away from Israel and give to another nation, that is, the Church. What would happen to Israel? Jesus told them, “**Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate.**” (Matt 23:38). And as far as the Temple, **Jesus said to him, “Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another, that will not be thrown down.”** (Mark 13:2) The fulfillment of the parable of the vinedresser and the cursing of the fig tree were fulfilled on the day of Pentecost when the “kingdom of God” was given to the Church and in 70 AD when Israel withered and died under the legions of Titus. Yet, there is one more parable of the fig tree yet to be fulfilled:

<sup>32</sup>“**From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near.** <sup>33</sup>**So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates.** <sup>34</sup>**Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away till all these things take place.** <sup>35</sup>**Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.** (Matt 24:32-35)

Now, I am going to offer a prophetic hypothesis, that is, that in referring to the fig tree Jesus is once again referring to Israel. Thus, when He says, “when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates,” Jesus is referring to Israel. For nearly two millennia there was no fig tree, no Israel, for which we might observe a tender shoot or leaf, that is until May 14<sup>th</sup>, 1948 when Israel was recognized as a state by the United Nations. Of the generation that witnessed this event Jesus said, “**Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away till all these things take place.**” Jesus put an “expiration date” on this prophecy, and according to my calculations (simple subtraction) we have about 30 year left before my “prophetic hypothesis” expires. Remember, the nature of hypotheses is that they are at best, “educated guesses.” No one should confuse the hypothesis with Scripture because as Jesus said, “**Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.**”

Right or wrong, the hypothesis (which I believe is a reasonable one) should make us recognize the significance of the times in which we are living. There are those that argue that God is done with the Jewish people, but the Catholic Church (and many other Christian groups) does not agree. I have already quoted the Catechism of the Catholic Church, but it warrants me to do so again:

“The glorious Messiah's coming is suspended at every moment of history until his recognition by "all Israel", for "a hardening has come upon part of Israel" in their "unbelief" toward Jesus. St. Peter says to the Jews of Jerusalem after Pentecost: "Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for establishing all that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old." St. Paul echoes him: "For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?" The "full inclusion" of the Jews in the Messiah's salvation, in the wake of "the full number of the Gentiles", will enable the People of God to achieve "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ", in which "God may be all in all." (CCC 674)

We are living in extraordinary times. If there ever was a time in the Church's history when she needed to be “watchful” it is now!

In this portion of the Olivet Discourse Jesus is directing His parables to His Church. He is speaking to shepherds and sheep alike warning them of the seriousness of the days ahead. We need to be watchful, and prepared. We are to be neither presumptuous of His imminent coming, nor become weary if He delays. We are not to become complacent presuming that our status within the Church will be sufficient for salvation, but as He exhorted earlier we are to “bear fruit that befits repentance.

<sup>8</sup> Bear fruit that befits repentance, <sup>9</sup> and do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. <sup>10</sup> Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. (Matt 3:8-10)

### The Necessity for Watchfulness

<sup>36</sup> "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. <sup>37</sup> As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of man. <sup>38</sup> For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, <sup>39</sup> and they did not know until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of man. <sup>40</sup> Then two men will be in the field; one is taken and one is left. <sup>41</sup> Two women will be grinding at the mill; one is taken and one is left. <sup>42</sup> Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. <sup>43</sup> But know this, that if the householder had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have watched and would not have let his house be broken into. <sup>44</sup> Therefore you also must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect. (Matt 24:26-44)

*As it were in the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of man.*

What was Jesus referring to when he referred to the "days of Noah?" To find this out we have to look to Genesis chapter 6:

*When men began to multiply on the face of the ground, and daughters were born to them, <sup>2</sup> the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were fair; and they took to wife such of them as they chose. <sup>3</sup> Then the Lord said, "My spirit shall not abide in man for ever, for he is flesh, but his days shall be a hundred and twenty years." <sup>4</sup> The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men, and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men that were of old, the men of renown.*

*<sup>5</sup> The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. <sup>6</sup> And the Lord was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. <sup>7</sup> So the Lord said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the ground, man and beast and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them." (Gen 6:1-7)*

This is perhaps one of the most enigmatic passages of Scripture, and there has been a great deal of speculation regarding it. Who are the "sons of God?" Who are the "Nephilim?" There is an apocryphal book of the Old Testament that did not make it into the Septuagint (the Bible that Catholics and Orthodox use) called the "Book of Enoch" which does shed some light on these characters. I will go over this briefly, but the reader must understand that while this is indeed interesting, it is speculative.

The "sons of God," or *ben Elohim* in Hebrew, is a term used in the Old Testament referring to angels. In the Book of Enoch these particular *ben Elohim* were referred to as "Watchers," whose job it was to watch over humankind. Some of these angels "fell" from grace under their leader *Semjâzâ* when they lusted after the "daughters of men" and descending from the "fifth heaven" they arrived on earth at Mount Hermon.

*And it came to pass when the children of men had multiplied that in those days were born unto them beautiful and comely daughters. 2. And the angels, the children of the heaven, saw and lusted after them, and said to one another: 'Come, let us choose us wives from among the children of men and beget us children.' 3. And Semjâzâ, who was their leader, said unto them: 'I fear ye will not indeed agree to do this deed, and I alone shall have to pay the penalty of a great sin.' 4. And they all answered him and said: 'Let us all swear an oath, and all bind ourselves by mutual imprecations not to abandon this plan but to do this thing.' 5. Then sware they all together and bound themselves by mutual imprecations upon it. 6. And they were in all two hundred; who descended [in the days] of Jared on the summit of Mount Hermon, and they called it Mount Hermon, because they had sworn and bound themselves by mutual imprecations upon it. (Enoch 6:1-6)*

It was under the influence of the fallen *ben Elohim* and their offspring, the Nephilim, *“that every imagination of the thoughts of [man’s] heart was only evil continually.”* It was for this reason that God decided to “blot out man” by means of the Flood, but not every man, for *“Noah found favor in the eyes of God.”* (Gen 6:8) There is a lot more to this story, but I want to bring up the significance of Mount Hermon as “ground zero” for the demonic activity that the Watchers introduced to humanity.

Mount Hermon, located in Caesarea Philippi, was a site of pagan worship during Old and New Testament times and even after. There is a cave at Mount Hermon known as the “Gates of Hell” and it was believed that the gods dwelt within this cave and would come out to interact with man. This was one of the locations that apostate Jews would go to worship idols, including the god, Baal. Most importantly it is at this same site that Jesus brought His disciples:

*<sup>13</sup> Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do men say that the Son of man is?” <sup>14</sup> And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Eli’jah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” <sup>15</sup> He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” <sup>16</sup> Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” <sup>17</sup> And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. <sup>18</sup> And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. <sup>19</sup> I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” <sup>20</sup> Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.* (Matt 16:13-20)

Is there a connection between the “days of Noah” and the account above? I believe so. In the days of Noah demonically inspired iniquity and lawlessness filled the earth, so it will be before the return of the Lord. The world will be purified as it was in the days of Noah with the Flood, but this time it will be with fire:

*<sup>3</sup> First of all you must understand this, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own passions <sup>4</sup> and saying, “Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things have continued as they were from the beginning of creation.” <sup>5</sup> They deliberately ignore this fact, that by the word of God heavens existed long ago, and an earth formed out of water and by means of water, <sup>6</sup> through which the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. <sup>7</sup> But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist have been stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.* (2Peter 3:3-7)

It was in the ark of Noah that humanity found refuge from the Flood, and it will be in the Bark (ship) of Peter, the Church, where the faithful will be purified *“as a bride adorned for her husband.”* (Rev 21: 2).

*“... and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. <sup>2</sup> But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?*

*“For he is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap; <sup>3</sup> he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, till they present right offerings to the Lord. <sup>4</sup> Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years.*

*<sup>5</sup> “Then I will draw near to you for judgment; I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow and the orphan, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the Lord of hosts.”* (Mal 3:1-5)

Those outside the Ark were taken away by the Flood...

*<sup>37</sup> As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of man. <sup>38</sup> For as in those*

*days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark,<sup>39</sup> and they did not know until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of man.<sup>40</sup> Then two men will be in the field; one is taken and one is left.<sup>41</sup> Two women will be grinding at the mill; one is taken and one is left.* (Matt 24:37-41)

... and those who are not in the Ark of the Church will be swept away unto judgment.

There was a decisive moment in the “days of Noah,” it was when “Noah entered the ark.” Will there be a decisive moment before the Lord returns when one must be in the Church? Very likely since Jesus has made an explicit comparison to the “days of Noah” and His return. Thus, He exhorts us, **“Therefore you also must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”** We must be ready, whether it is for the coming of the Son of man at the end of the age or at the end of each of our lives; and the place of readiness and grace is in the embrace of Holy Mother the Church.

### **The Faithful or the Unfaithful Slave**

<sup>45</sup> “Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time? <sup>46</sup> Blessed is that servant whom his master when he comes will find so doing. <sup>47</sup> Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. <sup>48</sup> But if that wicked servant says to himself, ‘My master is delayed,’ <sup>49</sup> and begins to beat his fellow servants, and eats and drinks with the drunken, <sup>50</sup> the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, <sup>51</sup> and will punish him, and put him with the hypocrites; there men will weep and gnash their teeth. (Matt 24:45-51)

**“Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household...?”**

Who is Jesus speaking of? Although He could be speaking of every Christian, I believe that He is specifically referring to the shepherds since it is they who are set over His household, which is the Church. The wise shepherds feed the sheep at the proper time with the food of the Word of God and the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist. Unfortunately, as you know, if you’ve been reading the essays from Holy Monday and Holy Tuesday, there have been far too many unwise servants who have not been doing their jobs and who have been fleecing the sheep. In this parable Jesus exposes why the wicked servants thought they could get away with their abuse of the sheep as they said to themselves, “My master is delayed.”

There may be additional reasons why shepherds abuse their position, but in the context of the Olivet Discourse and the “signs of His coming and the end of the age” the extraordinary abuse that has been reported over the past several decades has to raise an alarm in the mind of any believer that we may indeed be living in the “end times.” The lawlessness of some shepherds has been so brazen; such a blatant affront to God, that one is left wondering if they expect Jesus to return at all. Perhaps this is why the sheep rarely receive teaching regarding the Lord’s return (unless you happen to be an Evangelical or Pentecostal). May be if there was more study of the Olivet Discourse and discussion of Bible prophecy shepherds and sheep alike would give more attention to doing what we are supposed to be doing because we will be more mindful of the fact “the master of the servants will come on a day when we do not expect him.

### **The Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids**

*“Then the kingdom of heaven shall be compared to ten maidens who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. <sup>2</sup> Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. <sup>3</sup> For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; <sup>4</sup> but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. <sup>5</sup> As the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. <sup>6</sup> But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ <sup>7</sup> Then all those maidens rose and trimmed their lamps. <sup>8</sup> And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ <sup>9</sup> But the wise replied, ‘Perhaps there will not be enough for us and for you; go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.’ <sup>10</sup> And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast; and the*

door was shut. <sup>11</sup> Afterward the other maidens came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' <sup>12</sup> But he replied, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.' <sup>13</sup> Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour. (Matt 25:1-13)

In previous essays I discussed the traditional Hebrew wedding customs during the first century AD. The traditional Jewish wedding consisted of three elements, the Arrangement (*Shiddukhin*), the Betrothal (*Eyrusin*), and the Marriage ceremony (*Nissuin*). In the parable of the Ten Virgins Jesus is referring to the third stage of the wedding ceremony, the *Nissuin*.

After the completion of the *Eyrusin* ceremony the couple was essentially married, but could not, by Jewish law, consummate the marriage. The bridegroom would leave his bride to return to his father's house. They would be separated and not see each other for approximately a year. During this time the bridegroom would build onto his father's house a place for his bride and himself to live and raise their family; the bride would spend her time preparing her splendid wedding dress for the day when her bridegroom would return. When would he return for his bride? Only the father knew, and he would make this decision solely on his own council; even his son, the bridegroom, did not know.

In the fullness of time the father would send his son with a retinue attending him. Without warning the bridegroom would appear at the bride's home with trumpet blaring, and shouts of "Behold the bridegroom!" The bride and her attendants had to be ready for the bridegroom to come and "carry her away" (Hebrew: *nissuin*) to his father's house for the wedding feast.

Jesus' disciples would have been familiar with the events that Jesus was describing in the parable of the Ten Virgins. They would have understood the necessity of watchfulness because they understood that no one would know the "day or the hour" in which the bridegroom would come to carry off his bride. Jesus will again refer to elements of the Hebrew wedding tradition on Holy Thursday and after the Resurrection and we will discuss how these scriptures add to the beautiful mystery of Christ and His Church (Eph 5:32). There are, however, important things that we must take away from this parable; warnings to the Church that she is to be constantly vigilant and not presumptuous about her "virgin" status.

There were ten virgins who were invited to accompany the bride to the wedding feast; five were wise and five were foolish. They must have waited for some time for the arrival of the bridegroom because they all fell asleep. The wise virgins anticipated that there might be a delay so they brought extra oil for their lamps so that they could greet him should he come in the dead of night. The foolish virgins did not bring enough oil and by the time they were able to procure some they were too late, the door to the father's house and the wedding feast were closed to them.

On Holy Monday, Jesus had told a similar parable about a wedding for a king's son in which one person showed up not properly dressed. It didn't turn out well for him either as it was said of him, as it could be said of the foolish virgins, "Many are invited, but few are chosen." (Matt 22:14) To be honest, I find these two parables disconcerting. It seems like every other Sunday we sing some "gathering" song at the beginning of Mass in which every stanza ends with the phrase, "All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in the place." It is good that we are welcomed, and it is good that we are welcoming. The foolish virgins were welcome and so was the man without a wedding garment and it turned out that being welcomed is not enough. Watchfulness and preparation may get us through the door, but washing one's robes in the blood of the lamb (Rev 7:14) and being clothed in the righteous deeds of the saints is the path to being chosen.

*"Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns.*

*<sup>7</sup> Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory,  
for the marriage of the Lamb has come,  
and his Bride has made herself ready;*

*<sup>8</sup> it was granted her to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure"—  
for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. (Rev 19:6-8)*

## The Parable of the Talents

<sup>14</sup> “For it will be as when a man going on a journey called his servants and entrusted to them his property; <sup>15</sup> to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. <sup>16</sup> He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them; and he made five talents more. <sup>17</sup> So also, he who had the two talents made two talents more. <sup>18</sup> But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master’s money. <sup>19</sup> Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. <sup>20</sup> And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.’ <sup>21</sup> His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master.’ <sup>22</sup> And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.’ <sup>23</sup> His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master.’ <sup>24</sup> He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not winnow; <sup>25</sup> so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’ <sup>26</sup> But his master answered him, ‘You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sowed, and gather where I have not winnowed? <sup>27</sup> Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. <sup>28</sup> So take the talent from him, and give it to him who has the ten talents. <sup>29</sup> For to every one who has will more be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away. <sup>30</sup> And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth.’ (Matt 25:14-30)

**“For to every one who has will more be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away.”**

I guess nowadays we’d say, “Use it or lose it.” It would seem that this is a principle that not only applies to our physical and mental health but also works for our spiritual well being too. The thing about this principle is that as it applies to our physical and mental health, no matter how much we “use it” we will eventually “lose it.” As I get older I’m become increasingly aware of this reality. Fortunately, this is not the case with the “use it or lose it” principle when it comes to its spiritual application. Using the “talents” that God has given us has eternal consequences, and this concerns me greatly.

It’s relatively easy to measure whether I am “losing it” physically and even mentally. Am I losing body fat, gaining muscles mass; improving endurance? Am I still able to solve those difficult chemistry problems I used to be able to do when I was a teacher? But how do I measure whether I am “using it,” the talents that God has given me, sufficiently so as not to “lose it?” This has perplexed me for a long while. Am I alone in wondering about this? Perhaps rather than worry about if I am “losing it” and should just recognize that no matter what I do I am still an unprofitable servant.

## We Are All Unprofitable Servants

<sup>7</sup> **“Who among you would say to your servant who has just come in from plowing or tending sheep in the field, ‘Come here immediately and take your place at table?’**

<sup>8</sup> **“Would he not rather say to him, ‘Prepare something for me to eat. Put on your apron and wait on me while I eat and drink. You may eat and drink when I am finished?’ <sup>9</sup> Is he grateful to that servant because he did what was commanded? <sup>10</sup> So should it be with you. When you have done all you have been commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants; we have done what we were obliged to do.’”** (Luke 17:7-10)

I felt profitable when I was a teacher. I could look at my students and follow their progress even after they graduated and say to myself, “I helped them to be successful. Now, I don’t have students and I no longer have that sense of profitability anymore. I write, and I enjoy writing, but I’m not sure I have many readers or if they profit from my writing. But, what should it be to me whether I have students or readers? Mine is to discern the will of my Master, to be obedient, trust that He is my strength in weakness, and walk humbly before Him for “...**he gives more grace; therefore it says, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”** (James 4:6) As a follower of Christ am I not called to be “as He is” in this world?

**<sup>17</sup> In this is love perfected with us, that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so are we in this world.** (1John 4:17)

And Who is Christ? He is the eternally begotten Son of the Father, coequal in divinity and majesty with the Father and the Holy Spirit, and yet He did not count equality a thing to be grasped:

**<sup>5</sup> Have this mind among yourselves, which was in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,** (Phil 2:5-6)

Nor did He esteem His high estate with the Trinity, but condescended to become incarnate through the Virgin Mary and was found in the “likeness of men.” Even this condescension was not enough, for He emptied Himself taking the form of a servant.

**<sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.** (Phil 2:7)

Yet, not even this could plumb the depth of His love for us:

**<sup>8</sup> And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.** (Phil 2:8)

Jesus demonstrated His obedience to the Father and through this sacrifice He purchased us to be His fellow servants and His Bride:

**<sup>19</sup> Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; <sup>20</sup> you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.** (1Cor 6:19-20)

What then is there to say? That things did not turn out like I would have liked? That I have been unfairly treated?

**<sup>19</sup> You will say to me then, “Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?”<sup>bl</sup>  
<sup>20</sup> But who are you, a man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you made me thus?”<sup>21</sup> Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for beauty and another for menial use?** (Rom 9:19-21)

In light of this what else is there to say other than to repeat the words of the Virgin,

**“Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.”** (Luke 1:38)

And in yielding to His will for my life I pray that His grace toward me will not be in vain, for it is by the grace of God I am what I am. (1Cor 15:10)

### **Faith Alone vs. Faith and Works or Maybe Abide and Fruit**

It would seem like this would be the perfect opportunity to discuss the debate between those who argue for “Faith alone” versus those who say, “Faith without works is dead.” I’ve heard the nuanced arguments, and to me the safe bet is to do both, and beside all of the Protestants I’ve known who have argued the Faith Alone position have all done wonderful “works” for their communities. Instead, I think I’d like to approach this issue from a slightly different angle, that is, in the context of “abiding” and “fruitfulness.”

We’ve talked a lot about fruitfulness recently, especially in regard to the fig tree. One can think of fruitfulness as the work of the tree (will keep the fig tree analogy going). In bearing fruit a tree is accomplishing something that is natural to it. It is not extraordinary that a fig tree should bear figs because it is the nature of a fig tree to do that; its entire physiology is directed towards this end. The same should be the same for us if we abide in Christ:

***<sup>4</sup> Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.*** (John 15:4-5)

To abide in Christ is to be connected to the vine; it is the vine that sends its life to the branches. When we are abiding in Christ, the vine, we have His life flowing through us and we cannot help but produce fruit in abundance. It is, however, an act of will; we must choose to maintain our connection to the vine. Keep this in mind that staying connected to the vine is not something that is done between just the believer and Christ, it occurs in the Church, the Body of Christ. And if we don't maintain our connect with the Church then it is very likely we will begin to wither and before too long we'll fall away. It is in the Church that we can become more fruitful because this is where the pruning of the branches occurs.

***Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.*** (John 15:2)

As you can imagine pruning can be an unpleasant experience, but necessary for greater fruitfulness. It is unfortunate, however, that we so often misinterpret these times of pruning as negative and if we are not careful we might withdraw ourselves from the vine and the flow of Christ's life through His Word and Sacrament will stop flowing to us. This is especially true of the Sacrament of the Eucharist which for Catholics and Orthodox is the very real Body and Blood of our Lord and the source of our life in Him.

***So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; <sup>54</sup>he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. <sup>55</sup>For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. <sup>56</sup>He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. <sup>57</sup>As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me.*** (John 6:53-57)

The Body and Blood of Christ is the sap that runs through the vine which is the Church. As branches this sap runs through us, transforms us, and makes us fruitful when we receive it faithfully, and reverently.

We read in the passage above that the goats were those who did not do good works; or it is possible that they did good works? It may be that they produced fruit, but it was of their own making as it did not have its origins from the vine. They even may have believed that they were doing the Lord's work.

***<sup>22</sup> On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' <sup>23</sup> And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers.'*** (Matt 7:22-23)

We must remember we are not to do "works" for the sake of doing work or for our own self-aggrandizement.

***<sup>28</sup> Then they said to him, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" <sup>29</sup> Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."*** (John 6:28)

So we've come full circle. It is by faith that we have been grafted onto the vine and it is by faith that we stay connected.

## The Judgment of the Nations

<sup>31</sup> “When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. <sup>32</sup> Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, <sup>33</sup> and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. <sup>34</sup> Then the King will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; <sup>35</sup> for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, <sup>36</sup> I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ <sup>37</sup> Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? <sup>38</sup> And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? <sup>39</sup> And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?’ <sup>40</sup> And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.’ <sup>41</sup> Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; <sup>42</sup> for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, <sup>43</sup> I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ <sup>44</sup> Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to thee?’ <sup>45</sup> Then he will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.’ <sup>46</sup> And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” (Matt 25:31-46)

### Abide and be Fruitful

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### **The Last Judgment**

The scripture passage that we read, the Judgment of the Nations, is usually understood as the Last or Final Judgment at the "end of the age" when the Lord returns in glory. This judgment is sometimes referred to as the General Judgment to differentiate it from the Particular Judgment which occurs for each person at the moment of his or her death. After reading this passage I did some research regarding the Catholic understanding of the Particular versus the General Judgment and found some pretty interesting ideas that I wanted to share because I do not believe they are widely known. The following is taken from the Catholic Encyclopedia on the topic of the General Judgment:

"The Roman Catechism thus explains why, besides the particular judgment of each individual, a general one should also be passed on the assembled world: "The first reason is founded on the circumstances that most augment the rewards or aggravate the punishments of the dead. Those who depart this life sometimes leave behind them children who imitate the conduct of their parents, descendants, followers; and others who adhere to and advocate the example, the language, the conduct of those on whom they depend, and whose example they follow; and as the good or bad influence or example, affecting as it does the conduct of many, is to terminate only with this world; justice demands that, in order to form a proper estimate of the good or bad actions of all, a general judgment should take place. . . . Finally, it was important to prove, that in prosperity and adversity, which are sometimes the promiscuous lot of the good and of the bad, everything is ordered by an all-wise, all-just, and all-ruling Providence: it was therefore necessary not only that rewards and punishments should await us in the next life but that they should be awarded by a public and general judgment."

It is one thing to be aware of the good and the evil that we have done in our lives, it will be quite another things to see the consequence of lives in the lives of those whom we influenced by our being their child, or sibling, friend, spouse, parent, grandparent even beyond into generations we never knew or thought we would have an influence over. Imagine the vast web of interconnectedness that a single life makes through time for good and for ill. Imagine being shown this at the final judgment. It surely could augment the

reward of the righteous and aggravate the punishment of the wicked.

Now imagine a life of being a branch connected to the Vine of Christ. Imagine how that branch filled with the life of Christ continues to have its influence for the good of others through the generations even when that person dies. What a joy that would be to perceive that. What a reason to stay connected to the Vine, to produce fruit that will not wither or spoil but continues to bless and nourish those who were touched by you. God has willed that we can all be and do this. Let us abide in Him and produce much fruit that spread the seeds of faith far and wide beyond our comprehension and imagination.

### **Kevin's Reflection: Against Utopias**

In previous Photo-Journal essays I wrote that we have a natural inclination towards God and I referred to Saint Augustine's observation,

*"Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee."*

There is another inclination that God has built into our humanity and that is we seek to be in relationship with others and earnestly desire that this unity be universal encompassing the whole of humanity. This is one of the major points made by the great novelist, Fyodor Dostoevsky, in The Brothers Karamozov. There is a scene in which one of the brothers makes the following observation:

*[For] "man seeketh for himself on earth... a constant object for worship; one to deliver his conscience up to, and one that should unite all together into one common and harmonious ant-hill.... Humanity as a whole has ever aspired to unite itself universally. Many were, the great nations with great histories, but the greater they were, the more unhappy they felt, as they felt the stronger necessity of a universal union among men."*

Human attempts to achieve that which is only achievable by the grace found in the Church are all destined to fail. These failures only result in further human misery and tragedy, but humanity never learns as they will seemingly march to any pied piper piping a tune promising an unachievable utopia. From the very beginning Satan understood this, and he sought to undermine the plan of God by misdirecting these inclinations, to war against Christ's Bride. Satan does this not only to undermine the plan of God, but because he seeks union with his own anti-bride which he believes will give him the power to ascend to the heavens and dethrone God. We see his first attempts to achieve this in Genesis 11:

<sup>2</sup> *And as men migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there.* <sup>3</sup> *And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar.* <sup>4</sup> *Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth."* <sup>5</sup> *And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the sons of men had built.* <sup>6</sup> *And the Lord said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; and nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them."* <sup>7</sup> *Come, let us go down, and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech."* <sup>8</sup> *So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city.* <sup>9</sup> *Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth. (Gen 11:2-9)*

According to the Midrash (Jewish commentary on the scripture) Satan had "inspired" men to unite against God's dominance over them. *"God has no right to choose the upper world for Himself, and to leave the lower world to us; therefore we will build us a tower, with an idol on the top holding a sword, so that it may appear as if it intended to war with God."* (from Genesis Rabba, circa 300 to 500 BC). Much later rabbinical commentary also links to the story of Babel to man's inherent desire for universal brotherhood:

"The Netziv (Rabbi Naphtali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin, the 19<sup>th</sup> century Rosh Yeshiva of the famed Volozhin Yeshiva) has a fascinating and very instructive view on their plan. He explains that they were the first social engineers—hoping to create a utopian society where all lived and thought as one.... The problem with their plan was that it was the first step toward a tyrannical state where no individual expression would be tolerated, and G-d split them into separate nations." (from [https://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/1013006/jewish/The-Tower-of-Babel-What-Was-Up-With-It.htm](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1013006/jewish/The-Tower-of-Babel-What-Was-Up-With-It.htm))

The unity of the people of Shinar was not an end to its self, nor was the building of the Tower of Babel as it was the vehicle by which the people would be united in their defiance against God, and to make for themselves an name that would be above the name of God. This is suggested when we examine the Hebrew translation from the Orthodox Bible:

<sup>4</sup> *And they said, Come, let us build us an Ir and a Migdal, whose rosh (top) may reach unto Shomayim; and let us make us a **shem** (name), otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of kol HaAretz.*

<sup>5</sup> *And **Hashem** (the Name/God) came down to see the Ir and the Migdal, which Bnei HaAdam built. (Gen 11:4-5, Orthodox Bible, emphasis added)*

Can there be any doubt that it was Satan who was using the men of Shinar to help him make a “name” for himself, one that would stand above the name of God’s Son. Why did Satan choose humanity to try to accomplish his goal and not his fellow fallen angels? He chose men because humanity is destined to rule and reign which the Scripture clearly states:

*if we endure, we shall also reign with him; (2Tim 2:12)*

And who is it among humanity that is destined to reign?

<sup>6</sup> *Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunderpeals, crying,*

*“Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns.*

<sup>7</sup> *Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory,*

*for the marriage of the Lamb has come,*

*and his Bride has made herself ready;*

<sup>8</sup> *it was granted her to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure” (Rev 19:6-8)*

It is the Church, the Bride of Christ, who will rule and reign with her Bridegroom. It is her and the Mother of the Church, Mary the mother of our Lord, that will crush the serpents head under her heel:

<sup>15</sup> *I will put enmities between thee [the serpent] and the woman, and thy seed and her seed: she shall crush thy head, and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel. (Gen 3:15, Douey Rheims)*

The men of the Shinar valley failed because God intervened.

<sup>6</sup> *And the Lord said, “Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; and nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them.” <sup>7</sup> Come, let us go down, and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech.” (Gen 11:6-7)*

There is tremendous potential energy in humanity when we set about to do something as “one people,” in fact, “nothing that “one people” propose to do will be impossible for them.” Satan has attempted numerous times to tap into the potential energy by rallying humanity to unite themselves around something greater than their individuality, perhaps a charismatic leader, a false ideology or religion, the power of science and technology, and the hope for a utopic ideal such as liberty, equality, and fraternity. Satan cares nothing for his false leaders, ideologies and religions, or the technology that makes so many promises to improve the life of man; no these are just a means to an end. To ensnare humankind away from their authentic destiny in Christ’s Church and to employ the potential energy of human unity to create his own kingdom, if not in heaven then at least on earth. All Satan needs is to deliver to humanity “...a constant object for worship; one to deliver his conscience up to, and one that should unite all together into one common and harmonious ant-hill....” The “one common and harmonious ant-hill” will be Satan’s anti-church, the anti-bride, and its “constant object for worship” will be Satan’s Antichrist and his empty promise of utopia through global government and world domination.

“The Antichrist's deception already begins to take shape in the world every time the claim is made to realize within history that messianic hope which can only be realized beyond history through the eschatological judgment. The Church has rejected even modified forms of this falsification of the kingdom to come under the name of millenarianism, especially the "intrinsically perverse" political form of a secular messianism.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 676)

This is one of the great values of the Olivet Discourse and the Book of Revelation—it is an antidote against the Satanic deception of utopianism, but we must be willing to take it. Jesus tells His disciples how the end of the age will be. It

does not end with the great progressive movement of humanity towards some “new humanism” whereby man becomes “like God” as we are finally homogenized into one humanity, on world government—“one person,” No, this ends in judgment as those who serve the “man of lawlessness” on the ant-hill of subservience to the diabolical are thrown into the lake of fire. There will be no fulfillment of John Lennon’s Imagine; there will be only those who “endure to the end” (Matt 24:13) and who “call upon the name of the Lord” (Rom 10:13) even if it is only a remnant (Rev 12:17).

Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen spoke prophetically about all of this in a book that he wrote in 1948, *Communism and the Conscience of the West*.

[Satan] will set up a counterchurch which will be the ape of the [Catholic] Church ... It will have all the notes and characteristics of the Church, but in reverse and emptied of its divine content.”

We are living in the days of the Apocalypse, the last days of our era. The two great forces – the Mystical Body of Christ and the Mystical Body of the anti-Christ – are beginning to draw battle lines for the catastrophic contest.

The False prophet will have a religion without a cross. A religion without a world to come. A religion to destroy religions. There will be a counterfeit Church.

Christ’s Church the Catholic Church will be one; and the false Prophet will create the other.

The False Church will be worldly, ecumenical, and global. It will be a loose federation of churches and religions, forming some type of global association.

A world parliament of Churches. It will be emptied of all Divine content, it will be the mystical body of the anti-christ. The Mystical Body on earth today will have its Judas Iscariot, and he will be the false prophet. Satan will recruit him from our Bishops.

The Antichrist will not be so called; otherwise he would have no followers. He will not wear red tights, nor vomit sulphur, nor carry a trident nor wave an arrowed tail as Mephistopheles in Faust. This masquerade has helped the Devil convince men that he does not exist. When no man recognizes, the more power he exercises. God has defined Himself as “I am Who am,” and the Devil as “I am who am not.”

Nowhere in Sacred Scripture do we find warrant for the popular myth of the Devil as a buffoon who is dressed like the first “red.” Rather is he described as an angel fallen from heaven, as “the Prince of this world,” whose business it is to tell us that there is no other world. His logic is simple: if there is no heaven there is no hell; if there is no hell, then there is no sin; if there is no sin, then there is no judge, and if there is no judgment then evil is good and good is evil. But above all these descriptions, Our Lord tells us that he will be so much like Himself that he would deceive even the elect—and certainly no devil ever seen in picture books could deceive even the elect. How will he come in this new age to win followers to his religion?

The pre-Communist Russian belief is that he will come disguised as the Great Humanitarian; he will talk peace, prosperity and plenty not as means to lead us to God, but as ends in themselves ...

The third temptation in which Satan asked Christ to adore him and all the kingdoms of the world would be His, will become the temptation to have a new religion without a Cross, a liturgy without a world to come, a religion to destroy a religion, or a politics which is a religion—one that renders unto Caesar even the things that are God’s.

In the midst of all his seeming love for humanity and his glib talk of freedom and equality, he will have one great secret which he will tell to no one: he will not believe in God. Because his religion will be brotherhood without the fatherhood of God, he will deceive even the elect. He will set up a counterchurch which will be the ape of the Church, because he, the Devil, is the ape of God. It will have all the notes and characteristics of the Church, but in reverse and emptied of its divine content. It will be a mystical body of the Antichrist

that will in all externals resemble the mystical body of Christ ...

But the twentieth century will join the counterchurch because it claims to be infallible when its visible head speaks ex cathedra from Moscow on the subject of economics and politics, and as chief shepherd of world communism.

(Fulton J. Sheen, *Communism and the Conscience of the West* [Bobbs-Merrill Company, Indianapolis, 1948], pp. 24-25)

The Venerable Archbishop Sheen believed that we were living in the “days of the Apocalypse, the last days of our era.” There is evidence to suggest that Pope John Paul II also believed this. Before his election as pope then Polish Cardinal Karol Wojtyla gave a speech on the occasion of the bicentennial of the American Revolution spoke the following words:

“We are now standing in the face of the greatest historical confrontation humanity has gone through. I do not think that wide circles of the American society or wide circles of the Christian community realize this fully. We are now facing the final confrontation between the Church and the anti-Church, of the Gospel versus the anti-Gospel. This confrontation lies within the plans of divine Providence; it is trial which the whole Church, and the Polish Church in particular, must take up.” <http://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/john-paul-iis-warning-on-final-confrontation-with-the-anti-church>

Are there any signs that he might have been correct? Keep reading, check out the links provided, and make your own decision.

• Sep 13, 2019: **Pope Francis invites religious, political leaders to sign ‘Global Pact’ for ‘new humanism.’**  
<https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/pope-francis-global-education-pact>

• Sep 25, 2019: **Pope’s proposal for ‘new humanism’ would ‘wipe out Christianity’**  
<https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/popoes-proposal-for-new-humanism-would-wipe-out-christianity>

• March 27, 2017: **Cardinal Burke: Vatican hosting pro-abortion population control activist was ‘simply a scandal’**  
<https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/cardinal-burke-blasts-vatican-conferences-pro-abortion-speaker-i-dont-see-how>

During a September 10, 2019 press conference on route to Rome from Madagascar, the pope insisted that when the United Nations speaks, man must listen. “When we acknowledge international organizations and we recognize their capacity to give judgment, on a global scale—for example the international tribunal in The Hague, or the United Nations—If we consider ourselves humanity, when they make statements, our duty is to obey ... We must obey international institutions. That is why the United Nations were created.”

• Sept 11, 2019: **Full text of Pope Francis’ in-flight press conference from Madagascar**  
<https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2019/09/11/full-text-of-pope-francis-in-flight-press-conference-from-madagascar/>

There is concern that Pope Francis in his efforts to dialogue with other religions has been diminishing the singular authenticity of Catholicism in an effort to form a “one world religion.”

• Feb 19, 2019: **Cdl. Burke: Pope’s declaration saying God wills ‘diversity of religions’ is ‘not correct’**  
<https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/cdl.-burke-popoes-declaration-saying-god-wills-diversity-of-religions-is-not>

• May 8, 2019: **Pope Francis tells Swiss Guards: ‘Religious diversity’ is ‘human wealth’**  
<https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/pope-francis-tells-swiss-guards-religious-diversity-is-human-wealth>

**Pope Francis' prayer intentions for January 2016**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-6FfTxwTX34>

## *Ad Orientem*

### **Part IV: For as the Lightning comes from the East and shines as far as the West, so will be the coming of the Son of Man**

#### **Having an End-Time Ethos**

Try to have a discussion with Catholics regarding the “End-Times” and you’ll get some interesting responses:

- Expressions of incredulity
- Expressions of consternation
- “I don’t want the world to end.”
- “Protestants talk about this stuff, we don’t.”
- “When it ends it ends, but until then I’m not going to worry about it.”
- “The priests never talk about it, so why should we?”
- “Who do you think you are talking about this; you’re just a lay person?”

I could go on because I’ve seen and heard all of this and more. So why do I keep bringing it up when I get such a negative response from my audience? One simple reason, we, the Church, are the Lord’s Bride; and a bride that is not eager for the return of her betrothed is a bride whose love have waxed cold. (Matt 24:12):

*<sup>4</sup> But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. <sup>5</sup> Remember then from what you have fallen, repent and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. (Rev 2:4-5)*

Let me share an example our what I believe the Church’s ethos should be regarding the End-Times.

My father, Master Sargent Leo J. McMahon Sr., was stationed in Charleston, South Carolina in 1944. My mother, Caroline H. Finger, a Southern Belle from Charleston was working at the U.S. Post Office when my father arrived to deliver and pick up mail. For both of my parents it was love at first sight. As was so often the case during the War, hasty arrangements were made and they were married within a few weeks of their meeting. A couple of days after their marriage my father was shipped over seas to participate in the invasion of Europe. They would not see each other for nearly two years.

I have my mother’s trunk that she had used when she had gone to Brenau College in Gainesville, Georgia. Inside the trunk there is a box filled with letters, mostly written by my parents to each other during the War. It is hard to imagine what it must have been like to be separated from each other like that. How my Mom must have checked the Post each day to see if she had gotten another letter from my Dad. Was he okay? What was he doing? Could he even tell her? Was he even still alive? The joy she must have experienced when a letter arrived from him, and the apprehension she must have felt when opening the letter. He would say everything was fine; that he wasn’t in any danger, but she knew better, she would try to read between the lines. I have a picture of my Dad reading a letter from my Mom while sitting on a bench, in a tent, somewhere France—his little corner of sanity in the midst of the maelstrom of madness that was World War II. What bound them together against the horror, fear, the desperate loneliness, and even the monotony of the day after day, month after month of waiting was this singleness of mind: “He will come back to me,” and “Nothing, not Hell itself, will keep me from returning to my beloved.”

Do we love Jesus like this? Have we lost our first love? (Rev 2:5) Our pastors, priests, and bishops should be encouraging us to hold fast to the promise of our Betrothed return.

*<sup>23</sup> Let us firmly hold the profession of our faith without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. <sup>24</sup> And let us consider how to spur one another to love and to good works. <sup>25</sup> Let us not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but let us exhort one another, especially as you see the Day approaching. (Heb 10:23-25/MEV)*

Are we writing letters to Jesus in our thoughts, prayers, reading of scripture, church attendance, and preparing our wedding dress for His return? (Eph 5:27) Do we run out to our “mailboxes” to see if there is any sign of His return? We may not know the day or the hour, but we must always remain watchful, and ready:

<sup>42</sup> Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. <sup>43</sup> But know this, that if the householder had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have watched and would not have let his house be broken into. <sup>44</sup> Therefore you also must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect. (Matt 24:42-44)

If Jesus Christ, our Bridegroom, is our first love, then we will be watchful and ready for His return. This is what I mean by an End-Time ethos and it could rightfully be called an *ad Orientem* ethos. Our stance as believing Christians is to face East, if not physically then at least metaphorically for that is the direction where the Son of Man, our Bridegroom, will appear first.

*And when He was received again into Heaven He was borne towards the East, and thus His apostles worship Him, and thus He will come again in the way in which they beheld Him going towards Heaven; as the Lord Himself said, As the lightning cometh out of the East and shineth even unto the West, so also shall the coming of the Son of Man be. So, then, in expectation of His coming we worship towards the East. But this tradition of the apostles is unwritten. For much that has been handed down to us by tradition is unwritten.* (John of Damascus)

When facing East we do so as individuals and collectively as the Bride in anticipation of our Beloved's return. Yet, we are not to be so "heavenly minded that we are no earthly good." The Gospel of Luke tells of an account very similar to the one that Jesus tells in His parable of the talents (Matthew 25). Jesus is telling us to employ the gifts that He has given us until He returns:

*He called ten of his servants and gave them ten gold coins and told them, 'Engage in trade with these until I return.'* (Luke 19:13)

And as Saint Paul says in 1 Corinthians,

*"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain."* (1Cor 15:58)

We started off this *ad Orientem* reflection with a quote from Revelation chapter two:

<sup>4</sup> But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. <sup>5</sup> Remember then from what you have fallen, repent and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. (Rev 2:4-5)

This is a warning to us that we need to have an "End-Time" or *ad Orientem* ethos, that is, to hold above all else Jesus Christ as our first love, to be watchful and ready for His return, and to always abound in the work of the Lord. If we do not, if our Church loses her orientation then He will remove the "lampstand from its place." What is this "lampstand?" It is His Spirit, the *Shekinah Glory* that radiates from our hearts and from our Churches, the Third Temple. Let us pray and repent that He not remove His glory from us as He did with the Temples in Jerusalem as foretold by the Prophet Ezekiel.

<sup>18</sup> Then the glory of the LORD went forth from the threshold of the house, and stood over the cherubim. <sup>19</sup> And the cherubim lifted up their wings and mounted up from the earth in my sight as they went forth, with the wheels beside them; and they stood at the door of the east gate of the house of the LORD; and the glory of the God of Israel was over them. (Eze 10:18-19)

We have been warned by Ezekiel and by Saint John in the Book of Revelations about the *Shekinah Glory* leaving our churches, and even by the future Pope Pius XII, Eugene Cardinal Pacelli:

*"I am worried by the Blessed Virgin's messages to Lucy of Fatima. This persistence of Mary about the dangers which menace the Church is a Divine warning against the suicide of altering the Faith, in Her liturgy, Her theology and Her soul...I hear all around me innovators who wish to dismantle the Sacred Chapel, destroy the universal flame of the true Faith of the Church, reject Her ornaments and make Her feel remorse for Her historical past."*

*"A day will come when the civilized world will deny its God, when the Church will doubt as Peter doubted. She will be tempted to believe that man has become God. In our churches, Christians will search in vain for the red lamp where God awaits them. Like Mary Magdalene, weeping before the empty tomb, they will ask, 'Where have they taken Him?'"*

We have been living in the times of the innovators and dismantlers and while they may not have physically removed the sanctuary lamp (yet) from the church it has left the hearts and minds of the majority of Catholics who no longer believe in what the lamp was symbolizing: the *Shekinah Glory*, the body, blood, soul, and divinity of the Son of God in the form of

bread held in reserve in the tabernacle, the Ark of the New Covenant. [ <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/08/05/transubstantiation-eucharist-u-s-catholics/> ] How has this happened? By turning the Mass from a holy sacrifice which re-presents the mystery of the Triduum, to a community gathering at an agape meal.

Therefore let us return to our first love, be watchful and ready for His return, while abounding in the work of the Lord. And while we watch and wait let us visit Him whom we love in our churches, and receive Him reverently and worthily at Mass.

### **Returning to our First Love**

An End-Time or *ad Orientem* ethos is one that returns to and remains focused on our first love, Jesus Christ. In doing this we are fulfilling the first of the Two Great Commandments:

<sup>35</sup> *And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question, to test him. <sup>36</sup> “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?” <sup>37</sup> And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. <sup>38</sup> This is the great and first commandment. <sup>39</sup> And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. <sup>40</sup> On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.”* (Matt 22:35-40)

Our entire lives are to be oriented towards the Bridegroom and is manifested and expressed through our love of Him in our hearts, souls, and minds. We desire Him above all else. We seek communion with Him, to know and to please Him, to share Him with others, and to be like Him through grace so that He might find in us a Bride holy and without blemish. (Eph 5:27)

It is out of the overflow of this love that the work of the Lord abounds in us, as we love our neighbor as ourselves. This is the proper order of things, we love God because He first loved us (1John 4:19), and then the love of God, which He has been poured into our hearts, souls, and minds (Rom 5:5), is then shed abroad to our neighbor (1John 4:20-21).

And as we come to worship at Mass and Divine Liturgy we maintain this *ad Orientem* orientation, facing Christ in the re-presentation of the sacrifice that He made for us on Calvary. Here, in the Liturgy of the Eucharist we proclaim,

*When we eat this Bread and drink this Cup,  
we proclaim your Death, O Lord,  
until you come again.*

or, as is said in the Christian East,

*Mindful, therefore, of this saving commandment and all those things which came to pass for us: the cross, the grave, the resurrection on the third day, the ascension into the heavens, the session at the right hand, the second and glorious coming again.*

His “second and glorious coming again” is central to our Faith because He told us that He would not leave us orphans, but would come back for us,

*“Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. <sup>2</sup> In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? <sup>3</sup> And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.”* (John 14:1-3)

Jesus left to prepare a place for us. He will come again at the *Nissuin*, the Marriage feast of the Lamb, and take us for Himself, that we may be with Him as His Bride. We must be those five Wise Virgins who are watchful and ready.

### **Watch Therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.**

Watch for what? Jesus answered that in His Olivet Discourse, but let’s summarize it:

There will be wars and rumors of wars, famines, and plagues. Creation will enter of time of travail in anticipation of the return of the Son of Man. There will be earthquakes, and other natural disturbances that will increase in frequency and magnitude so much so that men’s hearts will fail them.

<sup>25</sup> “*And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth distress of nations in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves,* <sup>26</sup> *men fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.* (Luke 21:25-26)

There will be false prophets, messiahs, and shepherds who come in Jesus’ name. False christs will perform signs and wonders that will lead many astray into a deception so great even the very elect could be deceived. The apostate will betray and deliver up the faithful to persecution

Faithful Christians will be hated everywhere because of Jesus’ name. Because lawlessness and iniquity will abound the love of many will wax cold. Many will suffer and be martyred for the sake of the Name. The Abomination of Desolation, a great sacrilege, will be performed by the antichrist and/or false prophet within the Holiest of Holies of the Church, and possibly in a reconstructed Jewish Third Temple in Jerusalem.

Then the Great Tribulations will occur such as the world has never experienced or will ever experience again. So horrific is the devastation of this time that if it were not for the intervention of God no living thing would be left alive.

Yet, in the midst of all of these tribulations God will pour out a spirit of supplication and there will be many converted to the Faith, especially the Jewish people:

<sup>10</sup> “*And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of compassion and supplication, so that, when they look on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a first-born.* (Zech 12:10)

We are seeing many of these signs fulfilled in our time.

**“Then they will deliver you up to tribulation, and put you to death; and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake.** (Matt 24:9)

Christianity is now the most persecuted religion in the world.

- *Bishop of Truro’s Independent Review for the Foreign Secretary of FCO Support for Persecuted Christians Interim Report*  
[kevindcmahon.com/Faith/Behold%20the%20Bridegroom/linked%20articles/ChristianPersecutionReport.pdf](http://kevindcmahon.com/Faith/Behold%20the%20Bridegroom/linked%20articles/ChristianPersecutionReport.pdf)

***And because wickedness is multiplied, most men’s love will grow cold.*** (Matt 24:12)

As I discussed earlier regarding this passage wickedness is the result of lawlessness whereby humanity has rejected not only the Divine Law, but also the Natural Law. Each is doing what is right in their own sight. (Judges 21:25) They are those who call evil good, and good evil (Isa 5:20)

States are passing laws permitting unrestricted abortion, even allowing for the killing of a child born alive during an abortion procedure.

- *The Infanticide Craze*  
[kevindcmahon.com/Faith/Behold%20the%20Bridegroom/linked%20articles/Infanticide Craze.pdf](http://kevindcmahon.com/Faith/Behold%20the%20Bridegroom/linked%20articles/Infanticide%20Craze.pdf)

Who in their right mind would subject their child to this?

- *Drag Queen Story Hour with 'Annie Christ' sparks outrage in Philly*  
[kevindcmahon.com/Faith/Behold%20the%20Bridegroom/linked%20articles/DragQueenStoryHour.pdf](http://kevindcmahon.com/Faith/Behold%20the%20Bridegroom/linked%20articles/DragQueenStoryHour.pdf)

Satanism is now culturally acceptable:

- *The shocking truth about Satanism: it's not so bad*  
[http://kevindcmahon.com/Faith/Behold the Bridegroom/linked articles/The shocking truth about Satanism.pdf](http://kevindcmahon.com/Faith/Behold%20the%20Bridegroom/linked%20articles/The%20shocking%20truth%20about%20Satanism.pdf)

I could site example after example on the consequence of the abandonment of reason, but let us move on.

***And if those days had not been shortened, no human being would be saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.*** (Matt 24: 22)

The extinction of humanity has always been a possibility, but it would require a massive and catastrophic natural event on the order of an asteroid strike. Never were human beings capable of complete and total species suicide until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. If, for whatever reason, World War III happens and it employs nuclear or biological weapons then this may prove the existential threat necessary to fulfill Jesus' Olivet warnings. We are indeed living in dangerous times.

• *The five biggest threats to human existence*

[kevindcmahon.com/Faith/Behold%20the%20Bridegroom/linked%20articles/The%20five%20biggest%20threats%20to%20human%20existence.pdf](http://kevindcmahon.com/Faith/Behold%20the%20Bridegroom/linked%20articles/The%20five%20biggest%20threats%20to%20human%20existence.pdf)

It may not be something that we've created, or that we have weaponized, or may turn against us (AI like in the Terminator stories), it could simply be our advanced technological society which makes us more vulnerable to nature. For example, a solar flare on the order of the event that took place in the 1850's could take down the world's electronic grid along with the electronic devices. The Congressional study conducted in the 1990's and 2000's estimated that if such an event happened (or one created by an adversary by exploding a nuclear weapon high in the atmosphere) could lead to the death of as many as 80% of the United States population. Yes, you read that correctly.

• *Commission to Assess the Threat to the United States from Electromagnetic Pulse (EMP) Attack*

[http://www.empcommission.org/docs/empc\\_exec\\_rpt.pdf](http://www.empcommission.org/docs/empc_exec_rpt.pdf)

***For false Christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. (Matt 24:24)***

In the previous *Ad Orientem* essay I catalogued the great falling away that we've have witnessed in the Catholic Church during the past fifty to sixty years. If you have not read this essay I would encourage you to do so. Also, there has been great concern among some Catholic theologians and bishops regarding the heterodoxy coming out of the Vatican since the pontificate of Pope Francis and they are beginning to confront this issue head on through the publications of statements offering doctrinal clarity:

• *February 2019: Cardinal Müller's Manifesto of the Faith*

[kevindcmahon.com/Faith/Behold%20the%20Bridegroom/linked%20articles/Cardinal%20Muller%20Manifesto%20on%20the%20Faith.pdf](http://kevindcmahon.com/Faith/Behold%20the%20Bridegroom/linked%20articles/Cardinal%20Muller%20Manifesto%20on%20the%20Faith.pdf)

• *Easter Week, 2019: April 2019: Open Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church*

<http://kevindcmahon.com/Faith/Behold%20the%20Bridegroom/linked%20articles/OpenLettertotheBishopsoftheCatholic2019.pdf>

*May 2019: Declaration of the truths relating to some of the most common errors in the life of the Church in our time.*

<http://kevindcmahon.com/Faith/Behold%20the%20Bridegroom/linked%20articles/Declaration%20Truths%20Errors.pdf>

<sup>32</sup> ***“From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near.”*** <sup>33</sup> ***So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates.*** (Matt 24: 32-33)

In my commentary on this scripture I suggested that this reference to the fig tree could possibly be describing the return of the Jews from their diaspora of the first and second centuries to the homeland of Israel as prophesied in Ezekiel chapter 37. As I mentioned above, one of the signs of the End Times is that God will pour out a “spirit of supplication” and many if not all Jews will discover that their long awaited Messiah is actually Jesus Christ. It should not surprise us then that more Jews are converting to Christianity than at any other time in history, even the first century.

• *January, 2018: 'Marked increase' in Jews converting to Christianity, says Christian Witness to Israel*

<http://kevindcmahon.com/Faith/Behold%20the%20Bridegroom/linked%20articles/Marked%20increase%20in%20Jews%20converting%20to%20Christianity.pdf>

Contrary to what the article above may suggest, many Jews are converting to Catholicism; there is even a Jewish Catholic apostolate that seamlessly incorporates Jewish and Catholic tradition and can be found at:

<https://www.hebrewcatholic.net/>

Additionally, there is a Facebook, “Catholics for Israel” where I found this very cool video, “Israel's Greatest Secret:”

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JehBrmA3\\_Yk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JehBrmA3_Yk)

It must be remembered that the Olivet Discourse is sometimes called the “Little Apocalypse of Matthew.” As such, there are plenty more signs in the Scripture, both Old and New Testaments, especially in the Apocalypse of John which are too numerous to discuss in detail here. Some will claim that the Book of Revelation (aka, the “Apocalypse”) is only symbolic, or that it was only written to the early Church to encourage them during a time of great persecution. However, as I have discussed often I believe the prophecies of the Apocalypse are “polyvalent” meaning that they have significance in many eras and circumstances for the Church. I’d like to share one such fairly well known passage for the Apocalypse and suggest a possible interpretation for what Christians may experience during the End Time.

<sup>5</sup> *When He opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, “Come!” I looked, and there was a black horse, and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand.* <sup>6</sup> *Then I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, “A quart of wheat for a day’s wages, and three quarts of barley for a day’s wages,”* (Rev 6:5-6)

A day’s wages for a quart of wheat—what does that mean in today’s currency? I just got these numbers from the Internet:

- A 50 pound bag of wheat seed cost \$12.75
- 1 quart of wheat is approximately = 0.75 kg
- 1 pound = 0.45 kg
- The annual income of the American middle class is (on average) = \$48,561
- The average number of days the American middle class works per year = 260 days

How much does a quart of wheat cost in today’s money?

$$0.75 \text{ kg wheat} \times \frac{1 \text{ lbs}}{0.45 \text{ kg}} \times \frac{\$12.75}{50 \text{ lbs}} = \$0.43 \text{ (or 43 cents)}$$

What percent inflation does “A quart of wheat for a day’s wages” represent in today’s dollars?

$$\text{daily wage} = \frac{\$48,561}{260 \text{ days}} = \$187/\text{day}$$

The percent inflation can be determined by a simple ratio:

$$\frac{\$187}{\$0.43} = \frac{x}{100} \quad \text{where } x = \text{rate of inflation}$$

To determine “x” just cross multiply and divide =  $(\$187 \times 100) / (\$0.43) = 43,488\%$

What? Is that even possible? Hyperinflation has happened in the past many times. Consider the following examples:

- Germany (1923): 29,525%
- Greece (1944): 30,000,000,000%
- Hungary (1946): 42 quadrillion %
- Zimbabwe (2008): 89.7 sextillion %

Hyperinflation devalues currencies to the point where it is not only worth less, but worthless. This leads to widespread poverty, hunger, illness, unemployment, social collapse, and loss of freedom as the government steps in to restore order. Think this is impossible in the West? Many very smart people not only believe that this is possible, but inevitable. But, you can do your own homework on this topic, but I believe it is reasonable to suggest that hyperinflation will be part of the Tribulation that humanity, including the Church, will go through in the End Times.

I made a comment in the previous paragraph, that as a result of hyperinflation there is often a “loss of freedom as the government steps into restore order.” This understanding may give us insight into another passage from the Apocalypse.

<sup>16</sup> *Also it [the image of the Beast] causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead,* <sup>17</sup> *so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name.* (Rev 13:16-17)

The ability to surveil and then control what every monetary transaction across the globe would require (1) the elimination of all physical currency establishing what is known as a “cashless society,” (2) a computer system capable of recording

every transaction conducted world wide, (3) a single digitally based currency linked to this system, and (4) a global governance powerfully enough to enforce universal acceptance and compliance of the system. All of these system are already in place; all that is needed is an economic calamity of such magnitude that the people of the world would be willing to submit to it. It will be promoted as a means of restoring stability to the financial and monetary systems, but it will result in the absolute control of nations, governments, and individual liberty. Those who resist the system will be shut out until they are will to submit. Does this sound like some dystopic science fiction movie? Think again:

• *December, 2018: What A Cashless Society Could Mean For The Future*

[http://kevindcmahon.com/Faith/Behold the Bridegroom/linked articles/What A Cashless Society Could Mean For The Future.pdf](http://kevindcmahon.com/Faith/Behold%20the%20Bridegroom/linked%20articles/What%20A%20Cashless%20Society%20Could%20Mean%20For%20The%20Future.pdf)

• *July, 2019 How going cashless allows Big Brother to spy on your every move*

[http://kevindcmahon.com/Faith/Behold the Bridegroom/linked articles/How going cashless allows Big Brother to spy on your every move.pdf](http://kevindcmahon.com/Faith/Behold%20the%20Bridegroom/linked%20articles/How%20going%20cashless%20allows%20Big%20Brother%20to%20spy%20on%20your%20every%20move.pdf)

• *Soros-Backed Group Asks Mastercard to Blacklist Certain Conservatives*

[http://kevindcmahon.com/Faith/Behold the Bridegroom/linked articles/Soros Backed Group Asks Mastercard to Blacklist Certain Conservatives.pdf](http://kevindcmahon.com/Faith/Behold%20the%20Bridegroom/linked%20articles/Soros%20Backed%20Group%20Asks%20Mastercard%20to%20Blacklist%20Certain%20Conservatives.pdf)

***Therefore you also must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect.*** (Matt 24:44)

We must be ready, or as the NABRE translation states, we “must be prepared” for the End Times and the return of the Messiah. It is true that we don’t know that “time or the hour,” nevertheless Jesus told us,

*So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates.* (Matt 24:33)

When we see the signs that He spoke of throughout the Olivet Discourse that we’ve been discussing we should know that the Bridegroom is near, at the very gates. Are we seeing these “things” now? I believe so, but whether I am right or wrong it doesn’t matter because our Bridegroom has commanded us to be *watchful* and *ready* (prepared). How do we get ready for the single most important event in human history? It would be, after all, a bit more complicated then picking up some extra oil for our lamps from the local hardware store. (Matt 25: 8-11)

There are some commonly held assumptions that must first be dispelled before you can be ready. The first is that you can extrapolate the future from your experience of the past. That’s not going to work here; none of us have experienced anything like the events that Jesus described to His disciples on the Mount of Olives. Second, you must not assume that something of the magnitude of the End Time cannot be prepared for. After all, if Jesus said to prepare for it, then obviously it is something we can and must prepare for. Thirdly, there are a lot of Christians (mostly Protestants) that believe (assume?) that they don’t have to prepare for the End Times because they will be “raptured” before all the tribulations occur, and that they are not at risk of apostatizing because they believe (assume?) that “once saved forever saved” (a dubious doctrine known as “eternal security”). The fourth assumption is that if you believe that you may be living in the End Time people will more than likely think you’re a lunatic. Actually, they probably will, but remember the family and friends of the Magi probably thought that too when they set off to traveled through “field and fountain, moor and mountain following yonder star.” So, be prepared to prepare not only for yourself, but also for others so that should you be right you’ll be there to help and guide them through it spiritually, psychologically, and physically.

Spiritual Readiness:

*Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by giving heed to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, <sup>2</sup>through the pretensions of liars whose consciences are seared.* (1Tim 4:1)

Much of what is conveyed in the media, and taught in our schools is the “doctrines of demons” promulgated by those “whose consciences are seared.” We, our children and grandchildren, are surrounded by wolves (Matt 10:16); there are no “safe spaces” anymore, not even in our churches.

*Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour.* (1Peter 5:8)

The devil plays on our sinful inclination, telling us what we want to hear which is never the cross.

<sup>3</sup> *For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings,* <sup>4</sup> *and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths.* (2Tim 4:34)

The fact is we are now living in a time where what might have been adequate knowledge of the Faith won't cut it anymore. We need to know the Holy Scriptures, and we need to avail ourselves to the vast resources of the Church, especially the Catechism of the Catholic Church. What is being taught in too many of our churches, religious education programs, and Catholic schools and universities is the "wide gate" (Matt 17:13-14) and the only way to avoid this perilous deception is through knowledge and discernment.

*"test everything; hold fast what is good,"* (1Thess 5:21)

Are you prepared to test everything? Do you believe it is okay to even test the things said by your pastor, priest, theology teacher, bishop, and even the Pope? You need to be prepared to do this, and the scripture supports you in doing so.

<sup>10</sup> *The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea; and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue.* <sup>11</sup> *Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with all eagerness, examining the scriptures daily to see if these things were so.* (Acts 17:10-11)

Paul and Silas had just managed to get out of town where they had been met with Jewish opposition in Thessalonica. However, when they preached the Gospel in Berea the Berean Jews *tested* what Paul and Silas taught by "examining the scriptures...to see if these things were so." Luke, the author of Acts of the Apostles, did not reprove the Bereans for their diligence in testing the teaching of Paul and Silas rather he called them "noble." You may need to remind a religious leader or teacher of this the next time you put to the test what they have been teaching!

We must also remember that ultimately our conflict is not people, but the spirits who are influencing and even deceiving them.

<sup>12</sup> *For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.* (Eph 6:12)

We have a responsibility to examine what is being taught not just for ourselves, but also for our families. We should avoid conflict with our shepherds, but we must also be willing to share our concerns with them if we believe they have taught something contrary to perennial teaching of the Church. This is never easy and it must be done in a spirit of prayerfulness, humility, and yes, even boldness (see Gal 2:11-21). I am concerned that the Church is heading towards schism. Some people may believe I am over reacting, and I hope that I am. However, I must act in accordance with my belief and therefore it is required of me that I pray for the Church and her shepherds because it is only in speaking the truth in love that the Church will grow into all aspect of Him who is her head and Bridegroom, Christ.

*"...speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,* <sup>16</sup>*from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love."* (Eph 4:15-16)

Psychological Readiness:

The "End Times" are a taboo subject in Catholic circles. It is rarely if ever spoken about. I have brought it up upon occasion and it only leads to knitted brows of consternation or the subject quickly being changed to something else. Simply put, "most people don't think about what they don't want to think about." I get it, and I don't think most people, especially young people, should have to be thinking about it. All that most of us have to do is be psychologically prepared for the times in which we are *already* living and that means we are aware and diligent regarding the heresy and apostasy within the Church, that we will be subject to persecution by the world and even by those who should recognize us as their brethren, that we love our God with all our heart, soul, and mind and our neighbors as ourselves, and if needs be die for our faith. This was the faith that I was raised in. The lives of the saints and martyrs were a staple in my spiritual diet as a child. The End Times was nothing more nor less than what God expected of me every day because today could be *my* End Time and I was expected to face it bravely, filled with grace, with an Act of Contrition on my lips, and the scapula around my neck. Back then I had, indeed most Catholics had, an End Time ethos and we didn't even know it.

There are those, however, who cannot be disinterested regarding "signs of the times," they are obliged by their position to be watchful and ready—our shepherds; especially those whom God has granted greater authority, bishops and the Pope. And I would add another to this list: husbands, fathers, and grandfathers who have the authority of watchmen over their

families. These are the “watchmen on the walls,” and it is a grave responsibility. Once again we return to the Book of Ezekiel:

*The word of the LORD came to me: <sup>2</sup>“Son of man, speak to your people and say to them, If I bring the sword upon a land, and the people of the land take a man from among them, and make him their watchman; <sup>3</sup>and if he sees the sword coming upon the land and blows the trumpet and warns the people; <sup>4</sup>then if any one who hears the sound of the trumpet does not take warning, and the sword comes and takes him away, his blood shall be upon his own head. <sup>5</sup>He heard the sound of the trumpet, and did not take warning; his blood shall be upon himself. But if he had taken warning, he would have saved his life. <sup>6</sup>But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, so that the people are not warned, and the sword comes, and takes any one of them; that man is taken away in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at the watchman’s hand. (Ezekiel 33:1-6)*

The gift of authority comes with great responsibility. We dare not shrink from it or bury it because we are responsible not only for the temporal lives of our charges, but their eternal lives as well. This responsibility extends not only to our families, but also to the Church. There are those in the church who would tell us, “Be quiet and mind your own business.” But I will not keep silent.

*For Zion’s sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest, until her vindication goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a burning torch. <sup>2</sup>The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name which the mouth of the LORD will give. <sup>3</sup>You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. <sup>4</sup>You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called My delight is in her, and your land Married; for the LORD delights in you, and your land shall be married. <sup>5</sup>For as a young man marries a virgin, so shall your sons marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.*

*<sup>6</sup>Upon your walls, O Jerusalem, I have set watchmen; all the day and all the night they shall never be silent. You who put the LORD in remembrance, take no rest, <sup>7</sup>and give him no rest until he establishes Jerusalem and makes it a praise in the earth. (Isa 62:1-6)*

This is the “psychological readiness” or mindset that the laity must demonstrate now. Yeah, I know this is not our job; we have jobs inside and outside our homes, we raise families, and try to make ends meet. Perhaps we’re more like the watchmen during Nehemiah’s day when they were rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem with a trowel in one hand and a sword in the other.

*<sup>17</sup>who were building on the wall. Those who carried burdens were laden in such a way that each with one hand labored on the work and with the other held his weapon. (Neh 4:17)*

We, who are laity, cannot neglect our responsibilities, neither at home or in our Church, nor can we allow the clergy to neglect theirs as the prophetic Bishop Fulton J. Sheen observed:

*“Who is going to save our Church? Not our bishops, not our priests and Religious. It’s up to you, the people. You have the minds, the eyes, the ears to save the Church. Your mission is to see that your priests act like priests, your bishops act like bishops, and your Religious act like Religious.” Archbishop Fulton Sheen (Shrine of our Lady of Czestochowa, Doylestown, PA, May 28, 1972)*

I believe this is a good note upon which to end so I will be leaving “physical readiness” for another essay. Let us pray to have that *ad Orientem* ethos where we wait with eager anticipation for the return of our Bridegroom.