

THE SECOND COMING

Jerry Johnson

"...and they will see the Son of Man coming upon the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a trumpet blast, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other."

(Matt 24:30,31)

During this time of Advent, we not only prepare to celebrate Christ's first coming as a child born of the Virgin Mary, but we also focus on preparing ourselves for His second coming in glory on the last day. But what exactly does Sacred Scripture and the Sacred Tradition of the Church teach us about this final coming of Christ and what does it mean for our lives today?

"But of that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone." (Matt 24:36) To begin with, no one knows exactly when the last day will come. Many have tried in vain to predict a particular day and time, and they will likely continue to do so until the very end. But not knowing when the end will come should encourage us all the more to treat each day as our last... because it could be. The Church does teach, however, that before the end comes, the Church will "... pass through a final trial that will shake the faith of many believers". There will be a great religious deception brought about by the spirit of the Antichrist, a pseudo-messianism by which man glorifies himself in place of God..." (CCC 675) This will cause many to apostasize and reject the truths of the faith. The Church must first pass through this deception, this way of the cross, before the final resurrection. We see the seeds of this great deception throughout history every time faith in Jesus is rejected and replaced by a faith in someone or something else. When man returns to the original sin of desiring the role of God for himself.

When this time of trial is complete and the day of Christ's return does arrive, what will actually take place? First of all, Scripture tells us that Christ's arrival will certainly not be hidden. Everyone on earth will be aware of this amazing event; "For just as lightning comes from the east and is seen as far as the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be." (Matt 24:27) St. Paul describes the event this way: "For the Lord himself, with a word of command, with the voice of an archangel and with the trumpet of God, will come down from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Thus we shall always be with the Lord." (1Thes4:16,17) This rising from the dead, as the Church teaches and as we profess in the creed, is the resurrection of our bodies, which are reunited with our souls and glorified for eternity. (CCC 1016-17) This is also the time of the final judgment, as described by Jesus in Matthew chapter 25, where the sheep will be separated from the goats, the good from the bad. The righteous will go off to eternal life in God's kingdom and the unjust to an eternal punishment. All creation will be transformed on this day. It will be "perfectly re-established in Christ". (CCC 1042) John describes it as the vision was revealed to him: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them...' " (Rev 21:1-3) This is prefigured now in the Body of

Christ, the Church, but the consummation and perfect realization of this vision will only be fulfilled on the last day when all will be fully united in Christ. The catechism gives us this description: "Those who are united with Christ will form the community of the redeemed, 'the holy city' of God,... She will not be wounded any longer by sin, stains, self-love, that destroy or wound the earthly community. The beatific vision, in which God opens himself in an inexhaustible way to the elect, will be the ever-flowing well-spring of happiness, peace, and mutual communion." (CCC 1045)

As we await in joyful hope this final coming of our Savior, Jesus calls us to "Watch therefore--for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning lest he come suddenly and find you asleep." (Mark 13:35,36) This Advent, let us continue to ask ourselves this very important question: Are we prepared, or are we asleep? Are we ready to meet Christ now? If we have worthily received Him into our hearts and our bodies in this life, we will greatly desire to see Him face to face. Of this we can be certain, it *will* happen, at the hour of our death or when He comes in glory on the last day. "And then they will see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, look up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." (Luke 21:27,28)

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SACRED SCRIPTURE



"And Jesus answered them, "Take heed that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray...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. And then many will fall away, and betray one another, and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because wickedness is multiplied, most men's love will grow cold. But he who endures to the end will be saved. 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: 4,5,9-14)

"If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you." (Rom 8:11)

"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; 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; 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 24:29-31)

SACRED TRADITION

"We firmly believe, and hence we hope that, just as Christ is truly risen from the dead and lives for ever, so after death the righteous will live for ever with the risen Christ and he will raise them up on the last day. Our resurrection, like his own, will be the work of the Most Holy Trinity." (CCC 989)

"In death, the separation of the soul from the body, the human body decays and the soul goes to meet God, while awaiting its reunion with its glorified body. God, in his almighty power, will definitively grant incorruptible life to our bodies by reuniting them with our souls, through the power of Jesus' Resurrection." (CCC 997)

" Christ the Lord already reigns through the Church, but all the things of this world are not yet subjected to him. The triumph of Christ's kingdom will not come about without one last assault by the powers of evil." (CCC 680)

" When he comes at the end of time to judge the living and the dead, the glorious Christ will reveal the secret disposition of hearts and will render to each man according to his works and according to his acceptance or refusal of grace." (CCC 682)

As a final footnote; the popular scenario described as the "rapture", where it is envisioned that Christians will rise first and leave behind non-believers who will then experience the great tribulation, is not the teaching of the Church. An exploration of this topic would go beyond the scope of this article, but suffice it to say that Christ will return only once and as we already described, his return will not be hidden and the Church itself must pass through the tribulation before the final resurrection. See *Will Catholics Be Left Behind?* by Carl Olson and *The Rapture Trap* by Paul Thigpen for a thorough study of this false teaching that has crept into many Christian circles.