

**Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year C  
(Nov. 14, 2004)**

**All Manner of Thing Shall Be Well**

Repent! The end is near! Look to the salvation of your immortal souls!

Well, it's that time of the year, isn't it? It happens at the end of each liturgical year and the beginning of a new one in Advent that we begin to hear these apocalyptic descriptions of the end time and what is going to happen. Notice, I said "descriptions," not predictions, because none of the texts that we hear at this time of the year tries to tell us exactly when the end will come and, given the rather bizarre details that often accompany them, we are certainly not meant to take them literally.

This, however, will not deter the prophets and preachers who will be screaming hell-fire and damnation in the days to come. We heard it, didn't we, a few years ago as we approached the end of the second millennium and the beginning of the third. You know, the ones who will tell you on exactly what date the world will come to an end or just when we might anticipate Armageddon, so we had best be prepared. In the light of September 11, the message might seem even more appropriate than ever given the uncertainty about when and where terrorism might strike. Indeed the pictures we see in our papers and the TV coverage of the chaos and destruction in Iraq might make the poor people of that country think that the end had already come.

Well the prophet Malachi and Paul and Jesus are all concerned that we be prepared for the second coming of Jesus no matter when it comes, no matter how it comes. But they get much less excited about the specific details. Jesus even says at one point that he does not know when it will happen although the passage I just read to you tells us to pay attention to the signs of the times and in particular he says not to worry, but to put our trust in God.

The community that Paul was writing to, his dear friends the Thessalonians, really did think the end was near. Paul actually was probably a bit responsible for this because in his first letter to them he

seemed to hint at an imminent Parousia, that is, that Jesus would return very soon, even in his, Paul's, own lifetime. Well, as time went on and it didn't seem to happen Paul changed his mind, so he writes this second letter to try to correct some mistaken notions that he might have given earlier on.

It appears that some people were actually getting ready for the second coming of Jesus, thinking that it was going to happen very soon. They stopped working and were spending all their time praying and repenting and paying no attention to the ordinary, everyday responsibilities that we all have to live up to. Paul is particularly concerned that the poor are being neglected while the comfortable say their prayers. And the people who are acting this way are causing a great deal of trouble. There's trouble in Thessalonika. And that's why Paul writes his letter.

So he writes rather strongly to try to straighten out the situation. Those who won't work should not be fed. Once they get hungry enough they will get back to work. Mind you he's not talking about the poor who have no jobs. He's talking about able-bodied people with gainful employment.

The community for whom Luke wrote his Gospel were well aware of the destruction of the temple that Jesus spoke of in today's passage. It happened in the year 70 of our era. They might also know about the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius that occurred nine years later destroying a whole city and taking countless lives. They were experiencing first hand the kind of persecution and the division in families he mentions. But Luke wants to reassure them. Jesus, he tells them, says not to worry. The Lord will be with them. "By patient endurance you will save your lives, and not a hair of your head will be lost."

How do we prepare for the coming of the Lord? First of all, as Jesus says, "Don't worry." We know that God loves us and that God wants only the best for us. If the best does not always happen, we'll we have to presume that something got in the way. Have faith and persevere.

But then Paul adds a more practical note. He tells us that the best way to prepare is by doing what we are supposed to do. And do it to the best of our ability. In one sense we prepare every day for the coming of the Lord, don't we? We have to resist the kind of panic that can come from

something like Orson Welles's "War of the Worlds" or the doomsday proclamations of the street-corner preachers or the anxiety caused by terrorism.

A great example of the calm depth of faith I am talking about is Dame Julian of Norwich. She was an English mystic who lived in the late Middle Ages at a time of great trial and difficulty. The black plague had ravaged Europe, killing tens of thousands of people. There was great fear and depression. As if that wasn't bad enough the Church was torn by divisions the like of which we have never seen in our time in spite of recent scandals and other problems. There were even two popes each claiming to be the legitimate successor of Peter and excommunicating his rival. It was a terrible time. Some people were saying things could not possibly get any worse and surely the end of the world was near. Julian in her prayer spoke to God as Mother, not as Father. She had this sense of a mothering God and she asked her Mother-God what was going on. She tells us she heard God say pretty much what Jesus says in the Gospel today. Don't worry. I'm still in charge. I hold everything like a hazel nut in the palm of my hand and all will be well. All will be well. And all manner of thing will be well.

God is the maker, the Lover, and the Keeper of all things. "Not a hair of your head will be lost." And all manner of thing will be well.