

Amid the peace and prayerful atmosphere of Walsingham last week, I came to a comforting realisation. That regardless of the outcome of the General Election in December, and regardless of the final outcome of the Brexit saga, the gospel is the gospel. On 13<sup>th</sup> December God will still be God. On 1<sup>st</sup> February 2020 the future will still be his, and his Christ will return to rule the nations.

I say that not to trivialise our current politics, but because the language that has been thrown back and forth for the last several years has more than a hint of the apocalyptic about it. No matter who is headed to Downing Street on December 13th, and no matter which ideology wins out in the end, a good proportion of the country will be thinking that the end of the world as we know it is here.

The fact is that these have been the end times for 2000 years. It was the incarnation, the entrance of God into time and space that ushered in the end times, and until the coming of Christ again in glory, men and women of every generation will live amid confusion and fear.

Today's Gospel sounds quite forbidding. But if you listen carefully to what Jesus is actually saying about the End Times, while he speaks of dramatic events to come, he is also constantly telling us not to fear them. The paradoxical thing about apocalyptic language in the Bible is that it's much more about the present than about the future. In spite of the fact that the world seems to be collapsing about our heads, the followers of Jesus are not to feel adrift or to despair. The Lord will be triumphant, and he will always be at our side.

We do as Catholics believe in the End Times and the Second Coming of Christ – every Sunday we say in our creed that Jesus Christ will come to judge the living and the dead; every day in the Our Father we pray for the coming of God's kingdom; we know the struggles involved in living in these in-between times, and feel the severe

testing of the Church's faith before the end comes. But our response in a world that seems to have gone mad, our contribution to an age of despair, is to continue to have faith in God's goodness and ultimate victory, and never to lose hope. We don't have a fatalistic or despairing view of the future, but one rooted always in hope.

The month of November reminds us that, although the end of the world might be centuries, perhaps millennia from now, the end of our lives is always near, just a heartbeat or a breath away, when we will be called to give an account to our Maker. But that shouldn't be the cause of excessive worry or fear. Instead the imminence of death should make us alert and ready for Christ's return, or our return to him. It should encourage us to work on the tasks he has given us; spur us on to conversion and holiness.

Our current politics can drag you down, and it's chilling to observe human beings sink to new depths of evil, but while all that engenders in others a depressing hopelessness, we Christians rejoice in endless hope. Christ yesterday, today and for ever. Amen.

Fr Paul